

THE GOSPEL INVITATION

JOHN 7:37-38 • TV189B

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John 7:37-38

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”

Here is our subject today and we are going to hoe some corn. I am going to take on the whole, just about the whole, religious world today, with this message. The title of the message is: **“THE GOSPEL INVITATION.”** Now, that is the short title, **“THE GOSPEL INVITATION.”**

The long title of this message is: **“THE GOSPEL INVITATION AS OPPOSED TO TODAY’S ALTAR CALL.”**

I am turning to **John chapter 7: verses 37 and 38**, if you want to follow along in your Bible. It says, *“In the last day, that great day of the feast, the Lord Jesus stood and cried saying; if any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. And he that believeth on me as the scripture hath said, out of his belly, his innermost being, shall flow rivers of living water.”*

Now, I have preached a lot of meetings in these past 34 or 35 years in a lot of places. In some places I have been sharply criticized by some people in this way; they say, “You don’t give an invitation; you don’t give an invitation.”

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But, I beg your pardon; I solemnly beg your pardon; I most certainly do give an invitation every time I preach. Without fail, I sound forth clearly, a Gospel invitation; I invite men to Christ and I expect to extend that same invitation to you today.

I invite you to Christ; no, I do not give an altar call; I do not and I never have, the Lord willing, I never will.

There is an altar; *“we have an altar,”* the book of Hebrews says; *“we have an altar.”* It is an altar where penitent, broken hearted sinners, come to confess their sins and to sue for mercy and to seek the face of God, but that altar is Christ.

That altar is not a bench down at the front of a church building. Now, that is not where Christ is. I don't give an altar call. I do call men to Christ *“who is our altar.”* We have an altar but that altar is Christ.

I do not give; I do not invite men to the front of the church to be saved. Now listen to me; listen to the whole sentence, *“we do not invite men to the front of the church to be saved.”*

Salvation is not in the front of the church; it is in Christ. Christ is where salvation is. Salvation is not coming to a place, but it is coming to a person. That is where salvation is. It is not in a physical move, it is a spiritual commitment. I challenge anybody to question that.

Salvation is by faith, not by foot-work. Salvation is coming to a person, not to a place. Salvation is looking to Christ and receiving Christ, loving Christ, and submitting to Christ and knowing Christ, not in coming down to the front of a building or to a mourner's bench or to an altar.

I do not invite men to come and shake my hand for salvation. I don't know where all of this began do you? Who started all of this; it is not in the Word of God. There is no man who has the power in his hand to bestow salvation.

The only hand in which salvation, from which salvation can be received, has nail prints in His hands; it is Christ's hand. He said, *“Is my arm too short that it cannot save? Is my ear too heavy that it cannot hear?”*

You don't come to me for salvation; you come to Christ, to Christ, not to an altar, though we have an altar. I'm not discounting the confession of sin. I'm not discounting looking to Christ. I'm not discounting weeping and grieving over our transgressions. It is not to be done as a public display of our emotion; it is to be done in secret before God.

We do not invite men to come to us. I heard a man just the other day say, *“Now come to the front.”* He looked out to the television audience and said; *“if you have committed your life to Christ, write to me.”*

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Why should I write to him? What does he have to do with it? Well, he wants me on his mailing list. He wants my name so that he can write and get some money. He wants my name so he can brag about how many souls he won to Jesus. He wants my name so he can report it on his report to his supporters.

I am telling you this; there's nothing to be gained by coming to a bench. There's nothing to be gained by coming to the front of the church. There is nothing to be gained by shaking a man's hand."

My friend; with compassion I say to you; there's everything to be gained by sincerely, solemnly, willingly, lovingly, coming to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I will tell you; I am concerned about our generation. I see the floods of people moving to a man and moving to the front of a church. I see them in just droves, moving down to make a decision, moving down to make some kind of commitment, just like a whole host of people going down.

Salvation is not down here, salvation is in a person. These people make these commitments and decisions and have these experiences and sign these cards and all of these other things.

They are dealing with earthbound, human, mortals, sons of Adam. We must deal with Him in against whom we have sinned. We must look to Him who is the one sacrifice, the one sin-offering, and the one atonement. There must be a living, vital, union, established between us and the Son of God.

Then, if you want to come and tell somebody about it, do so. **John 6:37** says, "*All that my Father giveth me shall come to me.*" It is not coming to a man, not to a representative, not to a preacher, and not to an evangelist.

It is not coming to a place, not even to a theological position. The Scripture says, "*All that my Father giveth me shall come to me and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.*"

He stood that day in **Matthew 11** and He said; "*come to me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.*"

You wonder why so many loved ones have made professions of faith in these so-called revival meetings under the psychology of a preacher, where there is a choir singing a hymn. There are people crying and so forth and they make their decisions.

They go to church about a month, two months, six months, or a year and quit. You never can get them back inside the building. What happened? They were so gloriously saved two years ago, so gloriously saved in the revival meeting a year ago.

No, they came to the front. They came to an altar; they came to a preacher and they never came to Christ. That is sad and it is doing nothing but giving people a false hope, a false assurance, and a false salvation. It is a salvation that won't save and a redemption that won't redeem. It is so!

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Preachers all over this nation give the impression that if a man goes to the front of a building or to an altar or to a bench he is saved. That is not so! If a man gets to Christ he is saved.

Now then; you listen to me carefully and I am telling you the truth: If you being saved come to Christ as the old-timers use to say, “if you in your heart have laid hold of His mercy in Christ Jesus,” if you feel that you have a saving interest in Christ, this matter has not been settled between you and some high-pressure preacher.

It is not between you and some evangelist who has come to reap and to rape the community of its money. It is not settled between you and some soul-winner; this matter has been settled between you and God Almighty in Christ Jesus.

If that has been settled and you have been brought to the feet of Christ in true repentance and true faith and you want to confess Him, if you want to publicly declare that relationship; the waters of baptism are the place for you, my friend. *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”* That is exactly right!

You can go through the New Testament and you won’t find Peter, Paul, James, and John, out running the city-wide meeting, trying to see how many first-time professions they can get down the aisle or how many rededications they can get down the aisle or how many tithes they can get down the aisle, or how many full-time service they can get down the aisle.

They went out here and people were converted and they baptized them as a confession of faith in Jesus Christ the Lord. That is so and that is what the Scripture says.

I have no objections to people coming to the front; I have no objections at all for them to declare their faith in Christ. I do object in anybody coming to the front hoping to find salvation down there, it is not there.

I object to any preacher inviting any lost sinner to come and shake his hands and get saved. Salvation is not in a ritual. Salvation is not in a tradition. It is not in a custom and it is not in a journey down a sawdust trail.

Salvation is in Christ and He walked that trail of tears, and that trail of blood, from Pilate’s Hall to Golgotha’s Hill and died for our sins. If we can look to Him and if we can love Him, then we can embrace Him and we can lay hold upon Him.

If we can believe on Him and receive Him personally, individually, lovingly, and willingly in our heart, and bow in confession to Christ, then you come down to the front and tell folks about it and declare that God’s done something for you.

It has been settled; it has been settled. It has been settled at Calvary, settled in my heart, and settled yonder in my bedroom or somewhere where I got alone with God, without some human

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being messing me up, trying to make a Baptist out of me, or a Methodist out of me, or a Presbyterian or a Catholic out of me, or even a Calvinist of me.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke peace to my heart. I will tell you this; if man talked you into a profession then another man will talk you out of it. But, if Jesus Christ gave you the gift of eternal life, all the devils in hell can't take it away from you, never, never, never.

If Jesus Christ the Lord dealt with you in your heart by His spirit, through His Word, and brought you to love Him, trust Him and believe on Him and spoke peace to your heart, then there is no man that can lay anything to your charge. There is no conflict or confusion, trial, tribulation, or temptation that can take you away from Christ.

When that 5,000 walked off and left Him, then He turned to His beloved 12 and said; *"will you also go away?"* They said, *"To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."*

They got that salvation; they got that assurance, and they got that confidence straight from Christ and not from some high-pressured, evangelistic campaign; that is so!

Look back to our text again and we need to hear this. This generation needs to hear it. Just like I said to you; I am taking on the whole religious world this morning but I am doing it on purpose because it is a note that needs to be sounded. It is a word that needs to be spoken.

It is a warning that needs to be sounded because folks are looking for salvation everywhere but where it is; it is in Christ. It is a personal matter: *"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord and believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."*

In our text this morning, in **John 7:37**, it says; *"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus Christ cried with a loud voice, if any man thirst, let him come to me and drink."* That is what I am trying to say; *"let him come to me (to Christ)."*

Don't get mad at me; don't get upset! You might say, "Well, everybody is doing it." Well; in the days of our Lord, there was one man looking for Christ and that was Simeon. Two men entered the Promised Land and out of the two million that left Egypt, they were Caleb and Joshua.

Just because a lot of folks are doing something doesn't make it right. I am saying to you, this; salvation is to look to Christ; it is to come to Christ.

Here are four things that must be pointed out concerning this text in **John 7:37**.

First of all: There is the place where these words were spoken, the place and it was Jerusalem.

Our Lord stood and cried with a loud voice; *"if any man thirst, let him come to me."* Do you know where He said that? He didn't say it down in some pothole or some pub or some honky-tonk. He said it in Jerusalem standing on the steps of the temple, standing right there in Jerusalem.

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Jerusalem was the capital of religion. Jerusalem was the stronghold of tradition. Jerusalem was where there was the priest and the temple, the ceremonies, the sacrifices and the theologians. Jerusalem was where people came, supposedly, to learn about God.

That is where this invitation, this Gospel invitation was sounded, in Jerusalem. I will tell you this; do you know where the best mission field in the world is today? It is our churches.

There are more people in our churches who have missed Christ. They have the mechanics. They have the zeal; they have the enthusiasm, the activities of religion but have missed the person of salvation, they missed Christ. The biggest mission field in the world today is the average church, the place of Jerusalem.

Secondly: The occasion; it was a solemn feast, it was the Feast of the Tabernacles.

It was a religious gathering of the most important religious gathering to which every religious Jew from every nation had come. These people had come from everywhere, all nations for this day of celebration.

There were many sacrifices. These were days of solemn, serious, feasting. There were rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, and all of these things were carried on during these special holy days.

Now wait a minute; wait a minute! The time, Christ said, it was the last day and they had been there seven days. It was the last day, it was the great day. The ceremonies were over, the last sacrifice had been offered, and the last blood had been shed.

There was nothing to do now but go home; it was over. They had come from everywhere, to Jerusalem, the religious capital. They had come for the Feast of the Tabernacle. They had assembled there from everywhere.

All they could do was pack up, get the kids together, and load the camels and caravans and go home, go home just as empty as when they came. They would go home just as hungry as when they came. They would go home just as guilty as when they came. They would go home just as hopeless as when they came.

If a man came to this place seeking God, he found Him not. If a man came to this place looking for some hope, he found it not, no hope, no Gospel, and no peace. He found nothing but tradition, nothing but games, nothing but ritualism, nothing but ceremonialism, and nothing but legalism.

The Ethiopian Eunuch was probably returning to Ethiopia from a feast just like that. He had gone up there to worship God, to try to find out something about God, salvation, eternal life, and forgiveness.

On the way back he was reading the Bible in **Isaiah 53**. He met Phillip. Phillip said; "*Do you understand what you are reading?*" He had just come from Jerusalem. He didn't get anything up there.

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He said to him, *“I don’t understand it; who is it he is talking about himself or some other man?”* Phillip began at the same Scripture and pointed him to Jesus Christ. He preached Christ to him; he preached Christ to him.

Who is the speaker? *“If any man thirst,”* standing here in Jerusalem, standing in Jerusalem, on this great occasion, the Feast of the Tabernacles, when people had been there for a week, making a pretense of worshipping God, on the last day, when everybody is leaving and going home, our Lord stood and cried with a loud voice, *“if any man is thirsty; let him come to me and drink.”*

Now, you have come to everything else. You are like the woman with the issue of blood; *“you have tried many physicians. You have spent all that you have.”*

You have gone through the whole motions, the whole methods, and the whole bit. You have tried everything; *“now you come to me. Out of your belly, (out of your innermost being), shall flow rivers of living water.”*

If I can get to Him; that is what I am saying, that is what I need, Christ. We have brought them to the front. We have brought them to the altar. We have brought them to the baptismal pool. We have brought them to the sacraments.

We have brought them to our hands and shaken hands with them. We have brought them to sign our cards. We have taken them to the inquiry room. We have done everything known to man and beast to get people saved and it hasn’t worked.

It looks like somebody, somewhere, would resort to the old-time-way of pointing men to Christ. Everyone that comes to Him receives mercy and life everlasting.

Now; I want to give you three or four things in closing!

First of all: Now listen to me; the Gospel invitation calls men to Christ.

The Gospel invitation calls men to Christ; it commands men to come to Christ. Now, preachers tell them to come here, there, and yonder, but the Gospel tells men to come to Christ, wherever they can, to come to Christ, to lay hold upon Christ and to embrace Christ.

First, there is a condition stated. Now my friend, listen to me; this is so important. Our Lord said in **Isaiah 55**; *“Ho, everyone that is thirsteth, come to the waters. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.”* Every invitation of Christ, every promise of Christ is always conditional, that’s right! It is based on this condition, a need.

Every call, promise, and invitation, is based upon a recognized need; listen to it; *“the well do not need a physician; (that is what Christ said), but they that are sick. You go learn what that means.”* He said; *“I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*

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Our Lord Jesus Christ is only valued where there is a need. Where there is no need He is not loved. Where there is no need, He is not wanted. Where there is no need He is not valued. Where there is no need, He is not sought.

Do you know when water becomes precious? It is when there isn't any. Do you know when food becomes precious? It is when there isn't any. That's exactly right!

I will tell you when forgiveness becomes precious; it is when you can't find it anywhere else. When you know you need it and you can't find it anywhere but in Christ; that is when it will become precious. He said, *"I am the bread of life; if any man hunger, let him come to me."*

What is this thirst? *"If any man thirst."* I believe it is the thirst that David felt when he wrote, *"As the deer panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."*

I believe that it is the thirst that the Publican felt in the temple who said, *"God; be merciful to me a sinner."* I believe that it is the thirst that the thief on the cross felt when he said, *"I am getting what I deserve but this man has done nothing amiss. O Lord; remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

That is the thirst when I see my soul before God, when I feel the wrath of God against sin, when I see death approaching and judgment awaiting and eternity stretched out yonder through the millenniums.

"If any man thirst;" how important are these words. It is not when I feel good. It is not when I feel worthy. It is not when I feel holy that I take the first step toward God. It is when I am brought low in the dust of guilt and seek mercy and call upon Him for His grace.

"If any man thirst;" is anyone out there thirsty? Is anybody hungry? Christ said, *"I am the water of life."* Anybody hungry; *"I am the bread of life."* Anybody in darkness; *"He is the light of the world."* Anybody dead in sin; *"He is the life."* Anybody naked; *"He is the robe of righteousness."*

**"Come ye sinners
Poor and needy
Weak and wounded
Sick and sore
Jesus ready stands to save you
Full of pity, love, and power.**

**Let not conscience make you linger
Nor a fitness fondly dream
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.**

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**Come ye sinners
Poor and needy
Bruised and mangled
By the fall
If ye tarry
Til you are better
You will never come at all."**

That's the first thing; there is a condition supposed and there is a condition presented. He said, "*if any man thirst.*"

What is the remedy; what is the remedy? They say; "Get religion; go to church, sign a card, be baptized, tithe your money and write to me." Do you know what the remedy is? If you are thirsty, come Christ.

That is what He said, "*Come to me.*" Don't come to one of the disciples; "*come to me.*" Don't even come to a building that says, "It is my house." Come to Christ. "*If any man thirst let him come to me and drink.*"

That is what I have been preaching. "*Let him come to me,*" not to my law. Come not to the ordinances, not to the front of a building; "*come to me.*"

No prophet ever said that. Moses said, "*Come thou with us and we will do you good.*" Paul said this, the apostle Paul said; for us "*to look to Christ, to turn to Christ.*" Isaiah said, "*Come to the water,*" but our Lord said, "*come to me.*"

No preacher ever said that. John the Baptist said, "*Look; behold the lamb of God.*" The apostle Paul said, "*We preach Christ,*" but none of them ever said, "*Come to me.*" None of these prophets or preachers ever invited people to come to them; they told them to look to Christ, every one of them; look to Christ.

No law ever invited a sinner to come to that law. The law condemns and repels. He only can invite the hungry who has spread the table. "*He is the bread of life.*"

He only can invite the thirsty who is Himself the water from the well of life. He only can invite the weary who can give the weary, peace. He only can invite the guilty who can give the guilty pardon.

The reason I don't invite people to come to me is because I don't have any of those things to give but our Lord does. He only can invite those in darkness to come to Him because He is the light and He only can invite the dead because He is the life. Let Him come to Christ. "*If any man thirst, let Him come to me.*"

Now, who is this to whom we are invited to look or to come?

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First of all: It is the one whom the Father hath sent.

The Father said, *“This is my Son; hear ye Him. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”*

I exhort you to come to Christ because He is the one anointed of the Father. He is the one commissioned of the Father. He is the one sent. *“God sent his Son into the world.”*

Secondly: He is the one who died for sinners.

Now, my friends; there is a God to be reconciled and there is a law to be honored and there is a justice to be satisfied and there is atonement to be made. Jesus Christ is the one who did all of those things.

We have got to get to Him; we have to look to Him because He is the one anointed of the Father and He is the one who accomplished all that the Father demands and all that the Father requires of me. Listen to this: We are to look to Him because *“He is the one mediator between God and men.”*

Now you read your Bible in **1 Timothy chapter 2:5** and it says; *“There is one God and one mediator between God and men and that is the man Christ Jesus.”* In **Romans 8:34** it says, *It is Christ that died, yea rather, is risen again who is even at the right hand of God who ever liveth to make intercession for us.”*

He is the one Mediator and I must insist; (now listen to me); I must insist on this; this coming to Christ is not a physical coming at all and I believe that you are misled when somebody tells you to do something physically in order to be saved.

It is a spiritual coming. It is a spiritual laying hold upon Christ by faith; by faith you are saved, *“not by works lest any man should boast.”* It is by faith that we are saved. It is laying hold upon Christ by faith.

Third: It is closing with Christ in the heart.

Repentance is a heart work. Faith is a heart work. Belief is a heart work.

Fourth: It is receiving Christ, willingly receiving Christ into our hearts.

He said, *“He came unto his own and his own received him not. But, as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”*

You have every right to ask me, “Well preacher; what is faith? What is this receiving Christ? What is this believing on Christ?” Three things; now listen:

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There is knowledge, confidence, and committal. Paul said, *“I know whom I have believed.”* I know who He is, I know what He did, and I know where He is now. I know that He is the Son of God and He is the sin-offering, He is the Substitute, and He is the Mediator.

“I am persuaded (confident) that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him (is able to do all that he said).” I believe that Christ is that suitable, sufficient, effectual sacrifice. I believe that He can *“save to the uttermost them that come to God by Him.”* I have committed it unto Him, between Christ and me; I have committed it to Him.

So, the Gospel invitation is: *“Does any man thirst; let him come to me and drink; out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”*

It will be an inward life and it will be an inward glory. It won't be something that you will have to go to church every Sunday to get pumped up about, it will be in you. *“My Father and I will take up our abode with you and in you.”*

Romans 8:9; *“If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His!”*