

*Come to Me and Drink: John 7:32-52*  
 Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church  
 Sunday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017

I'll begin this morning by reading you a poem by George Herbert. Herbert was a poet in the 1600s and had some profound spiritual insights which he communicated beautifully in his poems. This one is called, "The Pulley."

When God at first made man,  
 Having a glass of blessings standing by,  
 "Let us," said he, "pour on him all we can.  
 Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,  
 Contract into a span."

So strength first made a way;  
 Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.  
 When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
 Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,  
 Rest in the bottom lay.

"For if I should," said he,  
 "Bestow this jewel also on my creature,  
 He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
 And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;  
 So both should losers be.

"Yet let him keep the rest,  
 But keep them with repining restlessness;  
 Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
 If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
 May toss him to my breast."

Do you get what he's saying about the way God made us, and the gifts God has given us? God has bestowed upon us so many rich blessings. But one thing that He withheld was rest. And, of course, we know from the first chapters of the Bible that mankind, through disobedience, was cast out of the peaceful dwelling of the garden. But in God's design the restlessness, the toil, of this fallen world is something that ought to pull us back to God. If God gave us all these wonderful things—food and drink and homes and families and friends and rewarding work to do and sunshine and trees and oceans and beautiful snow falls like Friday morning when every branch was covered with white—and if He also let us be perfectly content with all these things, then there would be no motivation for us to seek Him.

Herbert describes God as allowing mankind all of these many riches but without complete rest, without experiencing perfect contentment. On the contrary, we may have some pleasures and comforts and successes, but it's with "repining restlessness," discontented restlessness. For if we found ourselves completely satisfied in the things of this world (and many try to pretend that they are completely satisfied, or they've fooled themselves into thinking so) . . . if we try to rest in the pleasures and provisions of this material universe, then we miss out on the supreme joy of knowing God.

And it's into this fallenness, into this discontentment, that Jesus speaks these amazing words, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." What a wonderful Savior we have! He comes to us in our need. He comes to us in our utter desperation. He comes to us as we're discontent and also confused. We're not sure where to turn in order to quench that soul thirst which nags at us again and again. Even in the moments of success, when a person may feel that they have everything the world can give, there can be that nagging feeling deep within that says, "You're missing something." A person may feel like they're standing in front of a fire hydrant of earthly blessings, just taking in all the enjoyments and pleasures of this life, but they're still thirsty inside. God put that soul thirst within us as a means of drawing us to Himself.

Jesus stands up and cries out, "If anyone thirsts [is that you, friend?] . . . If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."

Pastor John Piper speaks of his father, who was an evangelist, would go around all over the country speaking at evangelistic gatherings. His dad said, the hardest part is getting people lost. Before they can be saved, they have to realize they're lost. Before they'll come to Jesus and drink, they have to realize they're thirsty. I hope today some of you will realize that you are thirsty. Maybe you've experienced that nagging feeling of discontentment, but you haven't known what to do with it. I hope you'll realize today how to interpret that feeling. It is a soul thirst that nothing can quench except Jesus. And I am so eager for you to identify that thirst within you and realize what it is, because this offer that Jesus is making here, it's for anyone who thirsts, it's for everyone who thirsts. What a generous offer He is making here! It's a universal offer. It's a universal invitation. Anyone who thirst can come and drink.

Obviously you're not going to come and drink from this fountain if you're not thirsty, if you don't sense that deep need within you. So I'm praying that the Spirit will work in those who are not yet believers and will cause you to sense that you are thirsty for something that's different than any drink this world can offer you.

I'll start by giving you some of the context of John 7, and then we'll continue to focus on what Jesus says here in verses 37-38 and John's added comment in verse 39. The simple outline for today will be verse 37, verse 38, and then verse 39. We'll talk about Jesus' invitation to Come to Me and drink in verse 37. We'll talk about rivers of living water in verse 38. And then we'll talk about the Holy Spirit in verse 39. But first, a bit of context of what's going on in this chapter.

As we studied last Sunday in the earlier part of this chapter, we saw that these things are taking place around the Feast of Tabernacles that is going on in Jerusalem. Jesus' brothers wanted Him to go with them to the Feast, but Jesus refused. But then Jesus did go, secretly. And then He spoke in the Temple. And there were mixed reviews. Some thought he was a good man. Others thought He was leading people astray. Some marveled at His wisdom. Others thought He had a demon. Some thought there was no way He could be the Messiah, and they wanted to arrest Him. Others believed in Him and said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?"

In the passage we've read this morning we see that the chief priests and Pharisees send messengers to arrest Jesus. And they misunderstand what Jesus is talking about. That's in verses 32-36. He's talking about returning to the Father, and they wonder if He's talking about going to teach the Greeks. Another classic misunderstanding as Jesus reveals spiritual truths and they totally miss it. And then later we see the ongoing confusion and divisions that arise concerning His identity. In verses 40-52 there are some who said, He's the Prophet. Others who said, He's the Christ. Others wanted to arrest Him. Others recognized the authority with which He taught.

But coming back to the setting of this Feast . . . Something that's interesting to know about the Feast of Tabernacles (which the text doesn't tell us, but we know from the tradition of this particular Feast) is that during the feast priests would get water from the pool of Siloam and there would be a procession to the Temple. There would be trumpets sounding joyfully as the water was brought to the temple and poured on the altar. This was part of celebrating what God had done to provide for them in the wilderness. You remember, that's what this Feast was about. They were dwelling in tabernacles, booths, tents, for a week to remember the 40 years their people had lived in tents in the wilderness—from the time God delivered them from Egypt until they were given the Promised Land. And this ritual of bringing the water to the altar was a reminder of the water that miraculously sprang from the rock. God provided manna for them in the wilderness. He also provided water for them.

### **Come to Me and Drink – verse 37**

So it's in the midst of these vivid memorials, on the last day of this feast (as verse 37 tells us) that Jesus stood up and cried out (He wanted everyone to hear Him), "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." And as you hear that bold and gracious offer, just think about Jesus' audience that day. I've just summarized many diverse reactions to Him, many of which were hostile. This was not a mainly encouraging environment. There were people in the crowd who wanted to arrest Him.

And yet the invitation goes out to all. He's speaking to enemies here, which reminds us what a compassionate Savior He is. He makes enemies His friends. He pours out His life to save those who are opposed to Him, who downright hate Him. That was us. We were opposed to Him. We resisted Him. We didn't believe His claims, didn't want to let Him into our lives. But He steps up and makes this lavish offer.

There's a scene in *The Silver Chair* that captures some of this. The Silver Chair is one of the Chronicles of Narnia books. Here's the dialogue in the book between Aslan, the Christ-figure lion, and the girl Jill (who is coming into Narnia for the first time and has never met Aslan the great lion before).

Jill finds herself in Narnia after an intense experience, and she is crying, and she realizes she's extremely thirsty. Then she hears the sounds of a gurgling brook, which is music to her ears. But as she approaches the stream, there stands the lion.

"Are you thirsty?" said the Lion. "I'm dying of thirst," said Jill. "Then drink," said the Lion. "May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill. The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. "Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill. "I make no promise," said the Lion. Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. "Do you eat girls?" she said. "I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it. "I daren't come and drink," said Jill. "Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion. "Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then." "There is no other stream," said the Lion. It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion—no one who had seen his stern face could do that—and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to

the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted.

That's a very profound little interaction there. Jill is acutely aware of her intense thirst. She knows her need. But there's a struggle inside of her when she realizes she can only come and drink on Aslan's terms. This is the only water there is, and to have it one must trust. You must surrender control. You can't say, Well, I want the satisfaction that Christ offers, but I don't want Christ Himself.

No, to come and drink is to come to Jesus. Notice how Jesus says it in verse 37, "come to ME and drink." The crowds, even Jesus' own brothers, wanted to have miracles and bread and whatever else from Jesus, but they didn't want Jesus for who He is. They weren't willing to submit to His teaching.

To come to Jesus and drink is to be satisfied in Him and to trust Him and submit to Him. You can't have it on your terms. You can't say, Jesus I want you to fill this void in my life, but, if you don't mind, I'd like you to stay out of my finances. I'd like you to stay out of my love life. I'd like you stay out of my career. Let's have some boundaries here. Jesus won't have it. He says, Come to ME and drink.

It's a difficult thing to do. It's impossible, really, if we're left to ourselves, in our natural, sinful, selfish condition. But what a freeing step it is to surrender your rights and to come and be satisfied in Jesus.

### **Rivers of Living Water – verse 38**

In verse 38 Jesus goes on to make a further point. "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Those who come to Him and drink, those who believe in Him, will experience this amazing blessing of having rivers of living water flowing out from them. We can't find a specific text that Jesus is referring to here, but Jesus may be summarizing what various passages refer to, the image of water flowing from God's people. For instance, Isaiah 58:11, "you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

Our lives should be like a flowing river, not like a dammed up reservoir. As the blessing and satisfaction of knowing Jesus quenches our thirst, as that river is flowing into us, the overflow should then spill into the lives of those around us. This is the love of Christ that is flowing into our lives, by the Spirit, and then flowing through us into the lives of others. And it can take many forms. As tangible blessings flow into our lives, there should be a generosity about us that wants to be a conduit of blessing to others, not just a reservoir where these gifts are held.

It may be in the form of welcoming new friends into our circle, inviting someone to your small group, reaching out to a neighbor and looking for ways to share the love of Christ. It could be in the form of hospitality or encouragement or biblical instruction or practical help of other kinds. It will take on many different forms. As we are being satisfied in Christ, we can then bless others and find ways to help them find their joy in Christ.

This is what God intends. And we can let the blessings flow from us to others, trusting that the river will continue to flow. God will enlarge our hearts and increase our capacity for joy in Him and extending those blessings to others.

On the other hand, if the river of blessing flows into our lives and we put up a dam so that the blessings accumulate around us, we will eventually dry up and shrivel up and die. Contrasting the Sea of Galilee with the Dead Sea is a way of illustrating this.

And this puts a vivid picture in my mind because I've swam in these bodies of water years ago when I was on a trip to the Holy Lands. In Israel there is the Sea of Galilee in the north, which is a large, fresh-water lake. It's a beautiful place—teeming with life, trees all around, fish to be caught. Then there's the Jordan River which flows into the Sea of Galilee from the north and out of the Sea of Galilee to the south all the way down to the Dead Sea. And when you get to the Dead Sea, it's very different than the lush environment of the Sea of Galilee. The Dead Sea is the lowest place on the face of the earth. Its elevation is 1,388 feet below sea level. It's very hot and dry. No fish in the water. The salt and minerals are so dense in the water that nothing can live in it. It's also so dense that when you get in it, you float. You don't even need a raft or water wings. You just lie there in the water and float. I remember my grandfather (on my mom's side) telling me about his trip to the Holy Lands (he had gone there years before I did), and he said he saw a man swimming in the Dead Sea who was just lying on his back reading his newspaper. It's really an interesting body of water to swim in.

But then you want to get out and rinse off, because it feels like you've taken a bath in doughnut glaze or something. I didn't like it all that much after a little while, but I'm glad I had the experience. It's still a reminder to me that I don't want my heart to be like that. I don't want my life to be like that Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea has the Jordan River running into it, but nothing runs out of it. Everything just sits there. That's why it's dead. The flow of the river teems with life, but where the flow stops, life ends. Don't be like the Dead Sea. Be like the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. May blessings flow into your life and then through you to others.

Leon Morris writes about the Qumran community who lived near the Dead Sea, “In contrast to the men of Qumran there is nothing of the piety of the pond about Christianity. [They] had withdrawn into the wilderness to become the people of the Lord. They became ingrown. They seem to have made no attempt to influence others and thus to bring the blessing to them. Just as the Dead Sea receives the Jordan, but gives nothing out and thus becomes lifeless and arid, so the Dead Sea sect sought to receive the blessing of the law of God and to keep it for themselves.” (377)

What a danger it is, church, for us to tend toward being ingrown. What a danger it is for us to get comfortable with what we have and to be overly protective of what we have and to be reluctant to share what we have because we’re scared or suspicious of what might happen if we widen the circle at all.

We must be willing and eager to open our arms to more and more people who would come to drink at this fountain. We should be begging others to come. Please, join us at this all-satisfying river. There is room for more. There is room for any who are thirsty.

### **The Holy Spirit – verse 39**

Lastly, let’s look at John’s explanatory comment in verse 39 and talk about the Holy Spirit. John is writing this after Jesus’ death and resurrection and ascension, so he gives us this explanation of what Jesus was referring to here when He stood up and spoke at the Feast of Tabernacles. “Now this [Jesus] 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.” What we learn here is that the rivers of living water are a result of the Spirit. Those who believe in Jesus, who come to Him and drink, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and then will be conduits of spiritual blessing to others.

We also get a key insight into salvation history here, for we see the connection between Christ being glorified and the Spirit being given. Charles Spurgeon has a great couple sentences on this, marveling at God’s creativity and intentionality in the timing of these events. He says, “I know not in what way the Father could have made the glory of heaven so effectually to flow from the heights of the New Jerusalem and to come streaming down among the sons of men as by giving that chief of all gifts, the gift of the Holy Spirit when the Lord had risen and gone into his glory. With emphasis may I say of the Spirit at Pentecost that he glorified Christ by descending at such a time. What grander celebration could there have been? Heaven rang with hosannahs, and earth

echoed the joy. The descending Spirit is the noblest testimony among men to the glory of the ascended Redeemer.”<sup>1</sup>

What a thing to marvel at. God’s timing in redemptive history is breathtaking. The Son ascends. The Spirit descends. And we’ll see more about this later in John. Jesus talks about this in John 14 and 15 and 16 (See John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 20:22). I’ll just read you one of those verses. In John 16:7 Jesus says this shocking thing. He will be leaving them, and they’ll be sad about that. But He says, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper [that’s the Holy Spirit] will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

This is an amazing thing. As awesome as it was for Jesus to be here on earth, there’s even more blessing that extends throughout the world with the coming of the Holy Spirit. There’s this new chapter in salvation history opening up as the Holy Spirit descends upon the early church after Jesus’ ascension to heaven. And this is what John’s comment in John 7:39 is getting at. It’s not that the Holy Spirit was nonexistent or inactive prior to this time. The Holy Spirit is eternal as the Third Person of the Trinity. And the Spirit has been active all throughout history. But this is something new. This is something powerful and exciting. The Spirit now indwells every believer and produces these rivers of living water flowing out of our hearts to bless others.

Do you remember what John the Baptist said about Jesus and about Him baptizing with the Holy Spirit? This was back in John 1:33, “*he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’*” (John 1:33, ESV)

In this is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, prophecies of the Spirit being poured out upon God’s people. [See Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-32]

What John the Baptist was beholding was the One who brought about these amazing promises. John merely baptized with water. His baptism represented repentance and led the way to something, to Someone, far greater. Jesus would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus would come and immerse His people in the Holy Spirit. So for those of us who are in Christ, the Holy Spirit is in us, guiding us, empowering us, sanctifying us.

John’s baptism was a baptism of water, signifying repentance, and preparing the way for a far greater Preacher and a far more significant baptism—the spiritual reality of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, C. H. (1882). *The Indwelling and Outflowing of the Holy Spirit*. In *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (Vol. 28, p. 305). London: Passmore & Alabaster.



immersing us in the Holy Spirit. That's something each of us, as believers, can consider and marvel at this week. Consider that Jesus has immersed you in the Holy Spirit. That should give us great encouragement regarding the security of our salvation and great motivation to live holy lives honoring to our Savior.

It makes me think of those great verses in Romans 8 about the Spirit, *"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."* (Romans 8:9–11, ESV)

Let's be very encouraged this week meditating on the fact that as believers in Jesus we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. And there are many things the Holy Spirit does. I'll just mention several of these in closing. First of all, the Holy Spirit is active in **regeneration**. Jesus said this to Nicodemus about being born again. He said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). The Christian life begins with a work of the Spirit. And the Spirit continues to work in us to **sanctify** us, to make us more like our Savior. The Spirit works in us the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22). The Holy Spirit is making us holy. The Spirit also **guides** us (Gal 5:18) and **teaches** us (John 14:26) and gives us **assurance** (1 John 4:13).

And the last thing I'll mention is that the Holy Spirit **unifies** us. All those who are indwelt by the Spirit are brought together in a wonderful and unique way, to the glory of God. In a couple places the Apostle Paul refers to the "fellowship of the Spirit" (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1-2). Paul also exhorts the church to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3).

And a bit earlier in the letter to the Ephesians, in the passage about the new unity among Jews and Gentiles in the Gospel, Paul says that "through [Christ] we both [meaning Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18). And a couple verses later, "In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph 2:22).

Tuesday evening, we had a "Table Talk" discussion on the topic of racial reconciliation. That passage in Ephesians 2 was central to the discussion. It was the passage where Jarvis Williams got the title for his book, "One New Man." In the Gospel, and only in the Gospel, can there be true reconciliation among

individuals from diverse ethnicities. Jarvis makes a point in the book that there is a difference between ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation. There may be schools and workplaces that make tremendous efforts to increase ethnic diversity. But that doesn't mean all these individuals are at peace with one another, have been reconciled to one another. It's only when there's vertical reconciliation with God that there can then be really meaningful horizontal reconciliation with others. And this is the beautiful thing that can happen in the church. As individuals from diverse backgrounds, diverse ethnicities, diverse life situations, are being drawn to the Good News of Jesus Christ sacrificed for sinners, we become part of the same family. We're indwelt by the same Spirit. We're brothers and sisters in Christ. And the kinship within this family transcends race. It transcends language. It transcends culture.

It's been a joy in my life to be able to travel to many different parts of the world and meet believers and fellowship with them and worship with them, even when there are language barriers, but to know that the same Spirit who dwells in you also dwells in me and that is an amazing bond of love to have.

Ken and I were remembering the Sri Lankan fellowship that meets in Doha, in the Middle East. I had the privilege of preaching there last Spring. As I preached, there were 2 translators who translated my sermon into 2 different languages. I remember the joy of worshipping with this group of believers. They were singing in languages I couldn't understand, but the the unity of the Spirit was unmistakable.

Let's cherish this, brothers and sisters. Let's seek to cultivate this more and more in our fellowship. We have the Spirit living inside of us. And the Spirit living in you is the same Spirit living in me.

And it's fitting that we'll celebrate the Lord's Supper together now, because this meal is a tangible way for us to demonstrate our unity. Here we are as a body of believers, and we're going to partake of this same bread and cup, showing that we share in common this Savior, Jesus Christ, who died for our sin, rose on the third day, ascended to heaven, and whose Spirit now lives in each of us who are repenting and believing.