

If Any Man Thirst

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Deeper Walking With God
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In John 7, just three verses beginning with the 37th:

“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. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”

Our Lord was at the Feast of Tabernacles. They were commemorating their deliverance and many years passed in the wilderness but the water from the rock. The priest would go to the Pool of Siloam and fill a pitcher with water and carry it down the street followed by a throng of people. And at the Temple, he would pour out the water by the altar followed by people saying, Isaiah 12:3, “Therefore with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation.” It was such a hilarious occasion that it was said that whoever has not witnessed it, has never seen rejoicing at all. But as Jesus watched this celebration, he must have been somewhat struck with the futility of the whole business for although this jubilant multitude went into raptures and as result of it with the same old heartaches and headaches and fears and it was a perfect example of how the law, represented by the priest, religiousness and ceremony, never has satisfied the thirst of the human heart. And it symbolized the failure of the waters of Israel and all its ??? and the futility of the stations and the philosophies and the pleasures of this age to satisfy a weary soul and why men may sometimes make great ado over such a ceremony. It doesn't amount to anything because they have forsaken the fountain of living waters and have hewn out cisterns, broken systems that can hold the water.

On this great day, Jesus did something most unusual: he stood and cried out loud, the 39th verse. He rarely spoke that way because “he shall not strive nor cry neither shall any man hear his voice on the streets,” but he stands today in a lost and tired world, thirsty and hungry and with all its scientific advances and its experience and its know-how dying of soul starvation. And in the midst of it all, he says that if you really want satisfaction, come to me. And it's a picture of what today we have a lot of empty pitchers from Siloam in the name of religion. We've worked up ecstasies and psychic heroes and in the midst of it all stands the Son of God saying, “Whoever is thirsty, come ye to the waters. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

But I'm not thinking so much right now of Christ's call to a lost world, I'm thinking of a Laodicean church who's daily experience these days is more like empty the pitchers of Siloam, than congregations of living fountains from whom flow rivers of living waters. Now, this feast was a religious observance; it was a commemoration of a time passed when Almighty God intervened in human affairs. The professing church of Jesus Christ today, for the most part, commemorates but does not duplicate the better days that are gone by when water flowed in the rivers. The experience now has become a performance and what was fundamental has become incidental and we put on gigantic celebrations but like Ephesus we have left our first love and like Pergamos we have put up with Balaam and Jezebel and like Sardis we have a name to be alive but God says we're dead. A mortician can make a dead man look better than he ever looked while he was living. The church experts sometimes can make such appear to be alive when God knows better about it. And Laodicea neither cold nor hot, nauseating to our Lord.

Now, this crowd in John 7 was not at home watching television. I simply state, this was a religious meeting and so for all appearances it was a great success and it probably came out in the papers what a wonderful time they'd had. Quite a celebration but God knew better and in the eye of the Lord, it was a host having an appearance of godliness without the power thereof. God sees this play-acting today, this make-believe and he sees us carrying empty pitchers of Siloam and Jesus is standing in the midst of churchianity today that passes for Christianity, crying above the crowd, "If any man thirst," if and that's a big if, "let him come unto me and drink."

I got hold of an article, a sermon that came out and was put in print three years ago when the Methodists celebrated Aldersgate and they made quite a thing of that and they might as well have done it because it was a great occasion when Wesley felt his heart strangely warm. It's been discussed through the years since whether he was actually saved then or came in through an awareness of sonship and passed from being just a servant to the realization that he was a son. But however that was, this preacher spoke at the big get together about Aldersgate and preached a sermon that really is terrific. I wore it out carrying it around with me and I kept meaning to have it typed and never did. I'll see if I can make it out. I'm going to have that done yet because it was a masterpiece and it said the trouble is we commemorated but we did not duplicate because you can't have an imitation of what happened at Aldersgate and the same thing doesn't happen to you. So, it was quite a statement and I'm not thinking about churches that are departed from the faith and over who's ??? has been written ?? think about Memorial Church down the street. They don't call it that, but that's what it is.

I'm often reminded of something that happened not long ago, a fine man who for many years had been an education man in a great church, a church that was great in many ways. Magnificent buildings, lots of that because of a lot of good people in it and he had done a noteworthy job. A man who wouldn't be critical for anything in the world for he loved that church. But in the midst of it all, after he had talked at length about it and he had written a little book he wanted me to look over, not about that, but wanted me to check it. After he had spoken quite at length about this church and how much it meant to him, he dropped his head and said, "But we lack something, and," he said, "I suppose it's the

Holy Spirit.” Honest confession, good for the soul, mighty hard on the reputation but good for the soul. And they have a whirlwind of activity and a lot of it’s good. Organized, standardized, wheels within wheels and when the power runs low they put on another wheel. Drives, campaigns, pageants, dramatics, expos and expos, picnics galore but like the big celebration at this Feast of Tabernacles, an empty religiosity all too often and you hear about the noise and the tumult, the Lord shouting out which he wasn’t accustomed to doing. “Throw away your empty pitchers from Siloam and come to me and I’ll make you a fountain of blessings.”

Now, what did they lack and what do we lack in a lot of our religiosity today, and we have a lot of it. Well, I think my friend was right, we sing ????? won’t you pray with all your power while we try to preach the Word, always ??? unless the Spirit and the holy one comes down. There are three kinds of worship: there is idol worship, there is idle worship and then there’s ideal worship. God says that must be in Spirit and in truth. Sometimes we’re a long way from it. A Christian is a new person, born of the Holy Spirit and he cannot know Jesus well and certainly ??? in that old nature. I’d hate to think how much of our religious activity today is being carried on by the old Adam, the flesh.

Now, the flesh is not the same thing as the body. You have to have a body to run around in, but the flesh is not only ??? you’ve still got it. I know there are some of the brethren saying that theirs has disappeared, but I haven’t been convinced. And we try to serve God with it but you can’t do it because “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” the book says and that’s why not many wise, mighty and noble have been called, “that no flesh should glory in his presence.” There is one reason that God picked out the ordinary folk. Not many wise, not many intellects. Those that are trying to get heaven head first, you get their heart first. The only thing I know that has its head and its heart in the same place is cabbage and you don’t go to heaven that way.

Wise and the mighty? How many Presidents of the United States do you think are believers, genuine, real New Testament Christians? We’re not judges but you worry a little about that sometimes. Now, I think we’ve had some but I’m no judge but I think that William McKinley, for instance, was a genuine Christian and after his assassination as he lay dying, the doctor was much impressed with the fact that here is a man who is ready to die and he’d been ready to live. And there are others, too. We’ve had some wonderful people in Washington. William Jennings Bryan was a great Christian and he never did get to be President. But by and large, not many mighty, not many noble, not many of the blue-bloods ancestors came over on the Mayflower or something and they are still proud of it, you know. The trouble with this ancestor business is they’re like sweet potatoes and the best parts are usually under the ground and so I don’t write much about that.

But God has not picked many out of those outfits in order that no flesh should glory in his presence. The alarming thing about all this today, beloved, is that we can put on a gospel pageantry, we can do it now with all modern tv show business and Hollywood and the new music and theatrical cleverness and just like the real thing and even the elect sometimes are on the scene, and to say a word of caution about it sounds like brass to

those who are deceived that they are dying. But Jesus wasn't deceived and as great as this looked, the big day in Jerusalem, and a religious day and yet he not only spoke in a way that didn't show out-and-out approval of them, but we have almost the same thing, Matthew 11, where he began to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done because they repented not, "Woe unto thee Chorazin, woe unto thee Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." And then he turned on Capernaum, he said, "Concerning these others, it would be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you." Jesus' home town was Capernaum; he was born in Bethlehem and lived in Nazareth but he settled in Capernaum in order to fulfill the prophecy about the light had come. He came to be the light and the trouble there was that he wrote "the heavens shall be brought down to hell for if the mighty works which had been done in you which had been done in Sodom," of all places, "Sodom would have remained unto this day but it'll be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

Now, that's a terrific thought. Sodomites were homosexuals, that's where the thing just stands out in the record. And our Lord said to these nice Capernaumites, some of them probably church goers but then Jesus came and went and they didn't do anything about it. They didn't crucify him, they did that in Jerusalem. They didn't push him off some ledge. They didn't try to kill him, they were nice and he said Sodom and Gomorrah were far better on the day of judgment than you Capernaumites. That's a terrific statement to make. Why? Because Sodom and Gomorrah never had the light and Capernaum had it. "This is the condemnation," this is the judgment, "that life has come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil? We are not judged by how many sins we have committed but by how much light we have rejected. That puts the shoe on the other foot, it puts a lot of nice people out in the dark on this subject. It's a terrifying thing when you come to think of it, how people are going to be deceived. "Why, I have nothing against Jesus. I'm in favor of him." But you didn't ?? him and the light came and you didn't walk in the light and you didn't receive the light. And Sodom and Gomorrah of all places, he picks them out, far better on the day of judgment.

And he said the reason you're like a bunch of kids playing in the market and crying to their fellows and saying, "We piped for you and you have not danced. We've mourned to you and you've not lamented." They said, "You didn't like John the Baptist because he must sort of an aesthetic. You didn't like me because I'd go right to dinner for folks." You can't please anybody and preachers have found that out too, in churches. You can't please them. If you're social, they say you're too much of an extrovert. And if you're solitary, they say that you're a loner and so they have a wonderful time, some pastors have with some people. But we've got them today. This generation is just like these children. They play funeral they play wedding and we call it playing church and there is an awful lot of that going on today. Just playing church and that is what Jesus said about it" playing church.

And here he stands at this big day, The big day, and wasn't impressed at all except with the fact that this crowd running around following this priest with a jug full of water from Siloam and yet they were just as hungry and as thirsty and don't know it for the real water. We need to awaken, my friends, to all that's gathered up in this. Jesus is speaking on this occasion about the average church that knows practically nothing about the Holy Spirit. And most of our church work today is done without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. It's all Adam, all too often. I heard of a boys' school that every morning they were supposed to recite the Apostles' Creed and each one was given a portion, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty" and so on down the line. One morning they were saying it and all at once there came a hole right in the middle of all of it and they looked around and a voice spoke up and said, "The boy who believes in the Holy Ghost is not here this morning." But I've been in some churches where the folks who believed in the Holy Ghost were not there as far as I can make out.

I'm a Southern Baptist and Doctor Mullins was one of our great leaders in the past and he wrote a book on Baptist beliefs and he says this strange thing: it is a strange and very significant fact that for nearly 2,000 years Christians have so generally neglected the New Testament teaching because of the Holy Spirit, the Baptist's Philadelphia Confession of Faith and New Hampshire Confession are without separate articles on the Holy Spirit. He said it is one of the strangest oversights that Christians should have neglected it for so long. Now, that's a good, honest confession from a Southern Baptist. Once in a while they do things like that and that's a good confession and from a great man who led them. And it's something to think about. We are so afraid of extremism about the Holy Spirit today because we think some folks go too far, that we are running the other way as fast as we can. We just about fly off of the reservation sometimes, trying to get away from extremism. Well, we don't want extremism to be sure, but we need the Holy Spirit and all is vain unless the Spirit of the holy one come down.

Well, they say, "How do you feel?" And they say, "Well, did Torrey believe in the baptism of the Holy Ghost? Or the feeling of the Holy Spirit?" He said, "Baptism, I don't worry about the terminology." Whatever some of these old fellows had, I'm in favor of it. I think of old Bud Robertson, the preacher, he was a second blessing man. Somebody said, "Well, I've had the third blessing, the hundredth blessing, the thousandth blessing." You say, "Well, if you think that then you ought to remind me of having just two." I tell you, I'm in favor of whatever some of these old boys had and I'm not criticizing too many of these souls that are out preaching today and I wouldn't do some things like they do but, brother, I like the way they're doing it better than I like the way most folks are not doing it in this day now.

"If any man thirst," that's where you start and that's where we're probably not getting any further. We don't start at the right place. Thirsty is not just wanting a drink of water casually. That's not thirsty. When you get to the place that people do where the only thing you can think of is water in your desperation, nothing else will satisfy your dying for water. That's thirst. Abject thirst. If any man means business he's deeply concerned about it. Thirst. Have you ever thirsted for the fullness of the Spirit? Have you ever hungered, really felt soul starvation in your innermost being about all of this?

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me.” What do you have to do next? Drink, receive, take. It’s just that simple. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth liberally and upbraideth not and it shall be given unto him, but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” And the next word he uses here, “then believe,” he that believeth, ask and then believe you have received, Mark 11:34, “Whatsoever things you desire when you pray, believe that you have received them and you shall have them.” And some folks ask God for wisdom and they get it and then they say, “Well, I don’t feel any different.” Well, you didn’t ask for feeling, you asked for wisdom. Why don’t you take God up on it if you mean business. If you mean business with God, God means business with you. You’re going to see he gives you as much wisdom as you need for the occasion. We ought to settle with him for it and that’s what Mark 11:24 and other kindred verses mean. Thirsting, coming, drinking, believing overflowing. Five steps. Are they overflowing? Take care of yourself as a result. But it begins with thirst. And it’s not just casually, “Well, it must be lovely to have the Spirit. Yes, I’d loved to be filled with the Spirit,” and that’s all you ever hear about it. Nothing ever happens.

“Be not drunk with wine but be filled with the Holy Spirit.” We must watch these earthly intoxicants and excitements and stimulants by which we try to simulate the work of God. But we must drink and believe we’ve received and enjoy what we do have of it. I think some people go to the other extreme and they don’t enjoy what they do have of God’s grace and we all do and that’s tasting the powers of the age to come that you read about in Hebrews. Are you enjoying as much as you’ve got of the grace of God? I like to study birds and the other day I heard over tv about some fellow who is just an ardent and avid bird watcher and he’s got a lot of money and that’s sort of a hobby and somebody called him up from the other side of the United States and said, “Well, I saw a one-legged woodpecker.” He jumps in his car and his plane, he’s got a private plane, and he takes off clear across the country to see that odd bird because the last day he was trying to see I forget how many more new birds and he wasn’t enjoying the birds he had seen, trying to find that other five or six or what it was. I don’t want to get that kind of religion. “I don’t enjoy what I have got of it.” And there’s enough of it, I hope, that you have to enjoy what you do have and at the same time, keep on drinking.

And when you come to the Lord, remember that if it’s according to the ??? why you can expect results. His Word, his will, your need and your faith. If what you pray for is according to his Word, according to his will, according to your need, it’ll be according to your faith. You can’t miss on that. And we thank God for these men who have set a worthy example through the years. Time fails me to tell about George Foxe and about Wesley and about Whitfield and about Christmas Evans and about Finney and about F. B. Marr, he had worked down long for the furnace of God and he was just almost sick. He was at Keswick in England and climbed a little hill and said, “Lord, I’m too tired to even pray but I realize the need of the fullness of the Spirit.” And with the same simple faith of which he took Jesus long before, he took and accepted and came down from the mountain and he hadn’t gone up there for feeling, he’d gone up there for filling which is something old Broadneck, used to be at Baptist Tabernacle in Atlanta. He went down to a church that wasn’t the same denomination and they had folks up there praying to be

filled. He went down, criticism or no criticism and he didn't shout and he didn't holler but he settled with God about it.

Anybody here tonight that doesn't have assurance? A lot of dear folks. Criswell of Dallas, after he studied preaching didn't have assurance and I rode with him one day and I had read about it and I said, "Tell me about that. Is that right?" "Yup," he said, "I would preach in the morning, be on my knees at night trying to feel saved." He said he couldn't. He said, "I finally got to the place where I said the Lord said over there in the book, He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. If I knew any better how to do it, I would. I do believe on the Son and I'm going to stand at the judgment day and say, Lord, I don't feel like I want to feel all the time, that's what I'm saying." You hear him preach now and why, he's satisfied about it. He settled on it. You can tell by the way he preaches, positive, like Barnhouse, Tozer. As ??? used to say, "I wish I could be of certain of one thing as Barnhouse is about everything." That kind of assurance.

But some folks never have it and they worry and worry and worry about it. Well, your background, your temperament, maybe what you were brought up in has a lot to do with it. Sometimes your nerves have a lot to do with it, but don't let the devil worry you out of that thing. You come to Jesus and how did you get saved? You asked him to save you. You trusted him with the faith of a child, the simpler the better.

A dear lady wrote to old Alexander White, that giant among preachers. "I just can't be sure I'm saved." And he wrote her back, "My dear sister," and I'm not quoting verbatim but he went on to say, "Out there in the wilderness there were several hundred thousand Israelites watching that serpent on the pole but the fellow on the back row couldn't even make out the outline of the thing way out there but he said, God didn't say see, he said look." You know, that's done me a lot of good. Many times when I couldn't see, I thought of this. But God didn't say that. "Look unto me and be ye saved." Where are you looking these days? Looking under Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith? That did me a lot of good one time in my life when I was bothered along that line. Your feelings, your nervous condition, your health, circumstances can get you down and the devil, of course, knows where the weak spot is and if he can get saints to think that they're lost when they're saved and sinners to think they're saved when they're lost, he's having a picnic. You can be sure of that and he works on both sides and has a lot of results with both of them.

But it's a simple thing coming and believing. Let me ask you tonight: do you know what it is? Did you ever know in your life what it was to have a desperate thirst for the fullness of God? Do you know anything about that? I like to think about that precious verse here, filled, hungry with good things. And the rich he hath sent empty away, Luke 1, in the magnificat. And I watch people go out of church sometimes and I say there goes old Sister Smith. I know her, bless her heart. She loves God. She came this morning hungry. Always looking for more. And she got it because she came for that. That's what she came for. Yonder goes Deacon So-and-so. He's a businessman in good shape. He doesn't need anything. He'll go to the Lord and say everything's okay. O, I don't mind but I'm in the church and helping out some. When they get in a pinch he gives them a big check and so

on but he goes out empty just as empty as he can be because he came in that way and wasn't hungry. There wasn't anything he wanted to begin with. They blame the preacher sometimes but generally it's because you didn't thirst and you didn't have a hunger when you went to the Lord God.

What did you come for here tonight? Did you come with a hunger? Is there a thirst in your heart for a blessing from God? Did you get what you go after? Some folks don't go to church with a basket to get a blessing. They go with a spy glass so they can find something to grumble about, hunting for something the preacher said that they can argue about. What did you bring to church tonight? Oh, if you bring an empty heart that needs filling and an hunger after righteousness, God will meet you. The trouble today is Laodicea didn't need a thing. God can't do much for folks that don't need anything much. And Jesus said, "Yea that the Holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus is not yet glorified." Of course, that means, you know, in death and resurrection. And the Holy Spirit hadn't come at Pentecost yet.

But you're not going to be filled unless the purpose in your heart is to glorify Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is never the central figure and he doesn't lead the procession in the Bible, his business is to testify for Jesus Christ. And any religious movement that makes the Holy Spirit the figurehead, is off the track because it's the business of the Holy Spirit to magnify Jesus Christ. And it's Christicentric all the way through and he enables us to do that.

Well, I watch them go out many times and I wonder what did they come in for, what did they want when they came. Well, you could talk about many others along this line. Old Alexander McClaren was a dignified English preacher but before his congregation he said, "Some of you have become so habituated to hearing the truth that it rolls off of you like water," we'd say like water off a duck's back. He said that from the pulpit to his own folk. He said it's like military horses that have heard canon go off right around them so much that they don't even tremble anymore if one is fired right by their very ears. He said, "You've heard the truth so long that nothing startles you very much."

Well, I wonder what it will take sometimes. He filleth the hungry with good things but the rich, how are you going out of here tonight? I remember when I was a pastor in Charleston, '34-39, I was much exercised about this very matter myself. I wasn't satisfied and I wanted to be usable to the glory of God and I'd heard so many things, read so many things about the work of the Holy Spirit and I didn't want to talk to any other preachers about it, other folks about it. But old Granny Russell lived there and she knew God and she sent me a book, "The Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians." I took it to my room and read it that night and I couldn't go to sleep good. I read it and then couldn't go to sleep because I had read it. And I got up there and walked up and down the ocean beach on the outer pond. Thought it a good place to pray, you know, and sing. That's the only place I sing because nobody can hear me. God gave me a thirst. O, I sat up all hours and that sort of thing but that isn't the way to be blessed but however, if your dead earnest enough to do that, there is virtue in waiting on the Lord. And the Lord blessed my soul. I didn't see any visions, dream any dreams. There wasn't any rustle of angel wings.

Oh, that blessed song, “This ??? Holy Ghost upon my heart back on the greatest /??? The book.” I don’t hear it sung much but that old song says I don’t ask for rustle of angel’s wings or anything ???? but do something about this dead, dull heart of mine.

And so, I settled with the Lord and I do know that it makes a difference. So, let me ask you tonight. I somehow couldn’t escape from it all afternoon and when you can’t escape from a certain thing, you’d better preach about it. I found out a long time ago a good rule for deciding what to preach about: talk about the thing that lies warmest on your heart at that time. You can’t miss. God won’t beat you up on things like that, he’ll lay something on your heart. I look over this crowd and I wonder: have you ever known this thirst? And when you have holy desperation, you’re getting in good shape for a blessing of the Lord. And that poor sick woman that had spent all her money on the doctors and was worse instead of better, nearly dead and one morning she got up and said, “Maybe I’ll die today and I don’t care if I do.” And then she heard a big noise outside and looked out the window at people going from every direction, “What’s up?” “Jesus of Nazareth is going through town.” She’d heard of him. Now, let’s get it straight, she didn’t know much about him but she said, “I’ve heard about him and he heals folks. Maybe if I can push my way through, maybe he’ll heal me and I’m going to try.” I don’t know whether she got some old rag of a dress that she’d spent all her money on. She must have been a sight to see, nearly dead. Alright, she got through the crowd and ladies don’t go through a crowd unless there’s a sale on at the department store. And she went right through and touched him. Two little words keep bouncing up in that fifth chapter of Mark, “throng” and “touch.” Everybody thronged him but only one poor sick soul, nearly dead, touched him.

And when she did touch him, he stopped and said, “Who touched me?” Poor old Simon Peter, you know, he had everything he said in the New Testament was a mistake except in his epistles. The Bible says, “And Peter said, Lord, why would you ask that? Who touched me? This crowd is shoving and pushing and you want to know who touched you?” Well, that’s typical of the man but thank God he loved Jesus anyhow. I’m glad he’s in there, it cheers me up sometimes to know there’s a character like Simon Peter. But there she was and she was a sight to see, I’m sure, because when you’ve been healed, you don’t care much about what style of dress you’re wearing on that occasion. And so, it was because she had a holy desperation. I never worry about anybody in the congregation that’s got holy desperation and a thirst and a longing for what God’s got for them.