

# G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

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## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### Sermon Notes

#### *The Feast of Tabernacles, part 6*

John 7:37-39

August 14, 2005

### INTRODUCTION

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated from 15 to 21 of Tishri, which fell in September or October (see Leviticus 23:34). In A.D. 32 [possibly the date of John 7], the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated on September 10-17. [This year, 2005, it will be celebrated on October 18-25.] The Feast of Tabernacles was instituted in the Old Testament, and was closely linked with the harvest of grapes and olives [NOT grain, which was reaped between April and June]: Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:33, 39; Deuteronomy 16:13. Old Testament References to the Feast of Tabernacles include Leviticus 23:33-43; Numbers 29:12-39; Nehemiah 8:13-18; Hosea 12:9; Zechariah 14:16-19. Leon Morris describes the significance of the Feast:

Tabernacles was the great Feast held when the [grape and olive] harvest was finally gathered in...Exodus 23:16 calls it “the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field.” There are references to the feast as lasting for seven days (Leviticus 23:34), and also to the eighth day (as in Leviticus 23:36), from which the conclusion is drawn that an original feast of seven days had been extended by one day [A special assembly took place on the eighth day of the feast, the 22 of Tishri]. Together with the note of thanksgiving for harvest, the feast commemorated the goodness of God to his people during the wilderness wanderings. The tents, or leafy bowers, which gave the feast its name, were erected in the courts of houses or on the roofs. Those in rule areas often built makeshift structures of light branches and leaves to live in for the week (hence “booths” or “tabernacles”). One scholar has noted that the distinctions between rich and poor were largely obliterated for the duration of the feast [because of the “tents” in which everyone lived]. Another theologian referred to the feast as “the Jewish camping festival” (though this translation obscures the fact that the feast had deep religious significance).

Jewish historian Josephus noted that the Feast of Tabernacles was “especially sacred and important by the Hebrews,” and “this is a festival observed by us with special care.” He concluded that Tabernacles was “the greatest and holiest feast of the Jews.” Thus, the Feast of Tabernacles was not simply “a Festival,” it was “the Festival.” John’s reference to the Feast of Tabernacles reveals that Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the Feast. John 1:14 states, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us...”

## THE WATER-DRAWING RITUAL

During the time of the morning sacrifices on each of the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles the High Priest took a golden vessel, known as a *flagon*, and filled it with water from the Pool of Siloam. It was then carried in a procession, headed by the High Priest, to the Temple. As the procession of priests approached the Watergate on the south side of the inner court of the Temple, another priest sounded the *shofar* [a trumpet-like instrument associated with joyous occasions] three times. The procession then followed the High Priest, still carrying the *flagon* of water, around the altar, as the Jewish pilgrims looked on. As the priests marched around the altar, the temple choir sang the *Hallel*, that is Psalm 113 – 118 [also in the Mishnah *Sukkah* 4:9]. When the temple choir reached Psalm 118 [“...His love endures forever...”], each Jewish male present [pilgrims included] shook a *lulab* [a bundle consisting of three myrtle branches, two willow branches, and one palm branch] in his right hand, as he raised a piece of citrus fruit in his left hand. The *lulab* symbolized the multiple stages of the wilderness wanderings [marked by the different types of vegetation]; while the piece of fruit symbolized the blessing of the ingathered harvest. Further, as the Jewish males waved the *lulabs* and raised the fruit, they each shouted “Give thanks to the LORD!” three times. The priestly procession then stopped at the altar and offered the water to God, along with the drink offering of wine. The wine and the water were then poured into silver bowls and finally poured out on the altar before the LORD.

### Verses 37 – 38

- *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast*
  - It is not completely clear whether the “last” and “great day” referred to here is the seventh or eighth day. The reason for this is that although *technically* the Feast was a seven-day festival, it lasted a total of eight.
  - Therefore, it is likely that this is a reference to the **eighth day** of the Feast
  - The Jewish historian Philo stated that the eighth day acted as “a sort of complement and conclusion of all the feasts in the year.”
  - The eighth day of the Feast was separate from the first seven in that it was a sort of rest day, or Sabbath. Also, there were particular sacrifices offered then, and the day also involved the disassembling of the booths and the continuous singing of the *Hallel* (Psalm 113-118).
  - Thus, as the last day of the Feast, and the only one when water was not offered and poured before the LORD on the altar, it seems as though the words of Jesus would possibly have had the greatest impact on the eighth day.
- Jesus stood and cried out, saying, **‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’**”

- Jesus' words in Verse 37 echo Isaiah 55:1, "Every one who thirsts, come to the waters."
- Therefore, Jesus is stating that He is the source of the water that will satisfy the thirsty soul.

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**IT IS AT THIS TIME THAT THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE  
WATER-POURING RITUAL COMES INTO FULL FOCUS:**

- 1. It [the water-pouring ritual] commemorated the LORD's provision of water in the desert wilderness through the rock which Moses struck**

Exodus 17:6

<sup>6</sup> "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Psalms 105:41

<sup>41</sup> "He opened the rock and water flowed out; It ran in the dry places like a river."

Nehemiah 9:15

<sup>15</sup> "You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger, You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, And You told them to enter in order to possess The land which You swore to give them."

**AS THE SOURCE OF "WATER" IT IS AS THOUGH JESUS IS MAKING A STATEMENT  
THAT HE IS THE TRUE ROCK**

- 2. It anticipated the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One in whom we find our salvation.**

Another Old Testament passage that is linked with the Feast of Tabernacles [and its water-drawing ritual] is Isaiah 12:3: "<sup>3</sup>Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation." The name of Jesus Christ literally means "Yahweh is my salvation."

- 3. It looked forward to that Day when rivers of "living" or "running" water would pour out from the Temple and give life wherever it flowed.**

Ezekiel 47:1-9 states, "Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar..." "It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live."

And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.”

At the end of the Book of Revelation [Rev. 21:22; 22:1], John writes of the New Jerusalem, stating, “I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple...Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb...”

As a result of the rivers of life, “you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.” Isaiah 58:11b

**4. It commemorated the LORD’s faithfulness through adequate rainfall, and subsequent fruitfulness in the harvest**

Zechariah 14:16-17 warns those who, in the Messianic Age to come, refuse to worship the LORD and commemorate the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths: “<sup>16</sup>Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. <sup>17</sup>And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.”

Note: Zechariah 14 was read on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles each year.

**5. It anticipated the Day when the LORD would fulfill His promises to pour out spiritual “rains” during the Messianic Age through the Holy Spirit.**

**Notice throughout the Old Testament, the water and the Holy Spirit are often linked. Nehemiah 9:20 even links the giving of manna and water with the giving of the Holy Spirit: “You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth, And You gave them water for their thirst.” This further reveals Jesus as the true Bread of Heaven and the Rock [from which the water came]**

Isaiah 44:3

<sup>3</sup> “For I will pour out water on the thirsty land  
And streams on the dry ground;  
I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring  
And My blessing on your descendants;  
<sup>4</sup> And they will spring up among the grass  
Like poplars by streams of water.”

Joel 2:28

“It will come about after this  
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;”

**THEREFORE, IT IS, AGAIN, CLEAR THAT JESUS IS REVEALING HIMSELF AS THE FULFILMENT OF ALL THAT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES ANTICIPATED.**

## Verses 38 – 39

- In his typical fashion, John gives a commentary on the words of Jesus here in Verse 39, stating: “But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”
- John states that “those who believed in Him [Jesus Christ] were to receive” the Holy Spirit.
  - When this happens, according to Verse 38, “From his [the believer’s] innermost being will flow rivers of living water.”
  - Literally, the phrase “from his innermost being” means “from within his belly”
  - As one scholar puts it, the accent in this phrase is “on the rich abundance of the Spirit’s life and power in the heart of the believer, like a self-replenishing stream” (Michaels).
  - Notice also that Jesus is the source of the stream.
- When Jesus states, in Verse 38, “as the Scripture said,” He may not be referring to a specific passage; however, He may be stating that when one believes in Jesus Christ, the Scriptures regarding the role of the Holy Spirit are fulfilled.
- John’s last words in Verse 39 are quite significant: “for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”
- Notice the connection between the giving of the Holy Spirit and the glorification of Christ. However, when John speaks of Christ’s glorification, he is typically speaking of the events surrounding His crucifixion.
- It is important to remember that the Spirit was not inactive up until this point; however, the spirit had not yet been given in the way that it would be after the Atonement.
- Notice, here, the **consistency** in the work of the persons of the Trinity:
  - God the Father sends God the Son to redeem His people [chosen by the Father in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to the counsel of His will]
  - Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, lives a sinless, perfect life
  - Jesus Christ is obedient to the will of the Father to the point of death on the Cross
  - Sin is, therefore, atoned for in the perfect life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  - God the Holy Spirit is, then, sent by the God the Father and God the Son to apply the atoning work of Jesus Christ [i.e. regeneration, sanctification, etc.] to God’s people

[The Athanasian Creed: “The Holy Spirit is not made nor created nor generated, but proceeds from the Father and the Son.”]

- The Holy Spirit indwells and sanctifies each Believer as temples of the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit also becomes as “rivers of living waters” springing “from the innermost being” of each Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Son preserves [and the Holy Spirit seals] each Holy Spirit-indwelt Believer.

**Therefore, the atoning work of Jesus Christ was the necessary prelude to the regenerating, indwelling, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.**

Leon Morris states, “sin must be dealt with before we can enter life in the Spirit.”

- Read **Ezekiel 36:25-27**