

"If Anyone Thirsts"

These words from Jesus about the Holy Spirit, are so especially critical for us today and so appropriate for the New Year. We live in an age of technology. That can trick us into thinking the key to progress and happiness will somehow have a technological answer. We live in an age of political polarization and preoccupation in which we might be tempted to think that Christian outcomes can best be achieved or at least protected by political power. This passage is critical and hopeful because it reminds us that while technology and politics may bring certain benefits, the spirit of the age can trick us into giving these things too much importance. What is most important is spiritual. Whether you are still exploring the Christian faith or you have already embraced the faith, it is important to understand that to have faith in Jesus and to follow him is to live a profoundly spiritual life.

We're returning to our series on *The Story of God and the Struggles of Life* and to *The Life of Jesus* this morning. The gospels don't always clarify the times of the events in the life of Jesus. But **John 7** is different. It places Jesus still in the north of Israel in Galilee and the opening verse says he would not go about in Judea, which is in the south, because the Jews, meaning the religious leaders, we're seeking to kill him. However, in **John 7:2**, John says, *The Feast of Booths* was at hand. That is helpful. There were three feasts called pilgrimage feasts or festivals in Israel. The 1.) *Feast of Booths* or *Tabernacles*, 2.) *The Passover*, and 3.) *The Feast of Weeks* or *Pentecost*. For each of these the Scripture required all the males to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship. So although Jesus had been avoiding the southern region, he is now going to go. This feast took place in September or October in our calendar. Jesus will be crucified at the Passover season in April, so this is six months before his death.

During this week-long Feast of Tabernacles, the people came to Jerusalem and dwelt in tents to remember the time that God had provided for them as He led them out of slavery in Egypt. While the air was filled with the joyful sounding of the trumpet, a priest, dressed in pure white linen, carried a golden pitcher of water to the altar, and there, the sparkling water was poured out. Water, so necessary to life in the arid land of Israel, was a symbol of the refreshing, life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit. This is the background when we come to

John 7:37 and read *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as^[1] the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*

*What Jesus teaches in **John 7** is that...*

I. YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE HOLY SPIRIT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF *THE HEART* OF YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE.

In **John 7: 39**, the apostle John's inspired comments on these words of Jesus explain that *this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

A. What Jesus is describing is the real presence and power of the living God deep within you.

The Spirit is the Holy Spirit of God. The Bible teaches us God exists as three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Their oneness is so deeply deep and inseparably eternal that they together are one God. This is called the Trinity.

An important thing to understand about the Holy Spirit is that He is a person, not a force. Notice that **verse 39** says: *By this, he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.* Never call the Holy Spirit, "it." In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is always "him" or "he." He is called the *Spirit of Jesus* (Acts 16:7) and the *Spirit of Christ* in (Romans 8:9). We are told that the Holy Spirit speaks, leads, feels, thinks, he can be grieved, and he loves. He is personal and real.

Application: Because the Holy Spirit is personal, your relationship with him has to be relational. If you are here and you haven't come to Christ as your Savior yet, you need to know that what he offers you is not just a key to heaven when you die a relationship in which God gives you a new birth, joins himself *to* you in deep union *with* you, and from which he flows up within you. Spiritual life is relational, and it is *rational* in that it is a conscious, deliberate relationship. It's not just emotional. Like any relationship, you have to think about it, reflect on it, and work on it.

Jesus promised the real presence of God at work in you.

B. This promise defines a big part of what it means

to be a true Christian.

Consider what Jesus said in **John 7:39**. Notice the words: *up to that time*, the time that Jesus was speaking was prior to his dying for our sins, rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven. The Spirit had not been given to believers *than* in the way he is given *now*! So now we are living in a unique period of history in which the Holy Spirit is not just given to *some* who believe, but to everyone who believes in and belongs to Jesus. We have to take that to heart.

Illustration/Application: Over the years, I've had people say: *"I don't get this emphasis on the Holy Spirit." Do I have to have a dramatic experience to know I am a Christian?* The answer is *"no,"* you don't have to have a particular experience, but you do have to have the Holy Spirit. Later in Scripture, In **Romans 8:9**, Paul says; *if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.* Now we have to be clear: *The evidence of God's Spirit at work in you is not perfect sinlessness or perfect happiness.* People who have the Holy Spirit experience real struggles and many sins. For some people and in some seasons of life, the influences of the Spirit may be stronger or weaker. The presence of his Holy Spirit isn't always dramatically manifest, but when the Spirit is present, his influence is present.

If you have concerns about this, go to God and say, *"Lord, help me sort this out so I can live in a healthy relationship with you. Say, "Lord, show me the reality of my heart and my sins, so I will feel how much I need your grace. Let me know in my heart, through the assurance of the Holy Spirit, the truth of the gospel that Christ died to pay for my sins and rose again as my Lord. Show me the evidence of new life, your life in me."* It is better to take it seriously than to just brush it off as if it doesn't matter. *Your relationship to the Holy Spirit is an essential part of the heart of your spiritual life as a Christian."*

Of course, the point of all of this is not just that you have the Holy Spirit.

II. TO LIVE A HEALTHY SPIRITUAL LIFE YOU HAVE TO OPEN YOUR HEART TO THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

In **John 7:38-39**, Jesus says; *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* The imagery is that we drink the water to quench our thirst, but then it becomes a river of water that flows up from within us for others.

This is not just the presence of the Spirit but also the influence of the Spirit on us and on others through us. The imagery of flowing water is that there is a vitality, a power, a divine influence at work in us.

If Jesus calls us to this and we thirst for it, then how do we experience and cultivate this kind of relationship with the Holy Spirit? Here are seven things to remember and practice. First,

A. Hold on to a healthy image of the fullness of the Spirit.

In the lands of the Bible, streams of water bring to mind an interior source of life and renewal and refreshment that was not dependent on outside sources or subject to changes in circumstances. Some people read this and turn it into something that is not attainable or biblical.

One problem we have with this is that many people who make a lot of claims about the Holy Spirit today are sketchy. False teachers make extreme claims about miraculous powers and divine revelations and states of extended spiritual euphoria. A couple of things can happen. Some people say, I'm not experiencing *all that*, so there is something wrong with me or wrong with my church or the ministry that I'm involved with. Others, with a more skeptical bent, just say, this whole Holy Spirit thing is just too sketchy and too goofy for me, so I don't want anything to do with it. That's no good at all. A life rich in the deep and very meaningful influences of the Holy Spirit is not sketchy or goofy, or only for a few, or out of reach for you or anything like that. It is the normal expectation for the life of a true Christian. It is the life to which Christ calls you. It is what he wants for you and from you.

In **Acts 6:3**, when the first deacons are to be chosen, the apostles tell the people to choose men of good reputation full of the Spirit and of wisdom. They were not being asked to find seven men who were at that moment in a state of spiritual euphoria, experiencing a sort of spiritual high accompanied by divine revelations and miraculous powers. They were asked to find men who, as part of their ordinary lives, were living in a healthy ongoing relationship to the Holy Spirit, yielding to his guidance and relying on his help. That same kind of life is that Christ wants for you and me. Do not let false ideas about the fullness of the Spirit rob you from an earnest desire to live in the fullness of the Spirit. Don't let a false idea of the fullness of the Spirit serve as an excuse for you to write off the possibility of a richer spiritual life for yourself this year. We need it. You need it. Hold on to a healthy image of the fullness of the Spirit and seek that fullness in your life.

Second,

B. Keep working at the practice of the presence of the Spirit.

In **John 14-16**, Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper. In those last hours with his disciples in the upper room, Jesus promised them that, after his death and resurrection, in this day and age in which we are now living, the Holy Spirit would dwell in our hearts and make real in our lives, the permanent, inward presence of Jesus himself. He wanted them to know that he wasn't going to leave them alone. He would come to them and live in them through the Holy Spirit. Christ wants you to be aware of and acknowledge His presence within you. It's all through the Bible. In **Ephesians 3:17**, Paul's prayer is that we would be strengthened by God's Spirit in our innermost being so that *Christ would dwell in our hearts by faith*. Sometimes we forget. We drift into dependence on our own abilities and efforts, or we rely too much on our feelings, which sometimes grow dull for long periods of time, and we end up living as if we don't really know who we are or what we have. You need to truly know; He is with you and within you.

Third,

C. Keep praying for them the richer experience of the Spirit.

Prayer is the most immediate and natural expression of the thirst that Jesus speaks of here in John 7. Prayer is asking for what we thirst for.

As a young man, Oswald Chambers, who wrote the book *My Utmost For His Highest*, battled a persistent sense of deadness in his Christian life. Finally, one night in desperation, He chose to start believing the promise that Jesus made in **Luke 11:13**. Jesus said: *If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*" He said he just claimed that truth with what he called a *dogged commitment* to it. He prayed for the power of God's Holy Spirit. He didn't have a dramatic vision, but he said that he absolutely did begin to experience a new power flowing in and through his life. You may *feel* powerless, but the Holy Spirit can breathe new life into your heart and your problems, no matter what they are. Jesus said the Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! Doesn't it make sense that continual prayer for the fulness of the Spirit, and a corresponding responsiveness and reliance on our part is a big part of following Jesus? We so deeply need him! Pray without ceasing and pray in expectant faith for the help and fulness of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth,

D. Live in responsiveness to your need for his guidance.

Illustration: It has been said the Christian life should be more like sailing a sailboat than rowing a rowboat. If you approach the Christian life like rowing a rowboat. It's all up to you. When you realize that the Christian life is a life long process, it's like you are rowing your boat across the ocean. It's a long pull, and the more you realize how far you have to go, the more exhausting and discouraging it becomes. Some people quit trying so hard day after day. They decide to just drift. They just hang on and hope for the best.

Real spiritual change and transformation doesn't come by just trying hard all the time, and it doesn't come by giving up and drifting either. A better image of the Christian life is that of a sailboat. In a sailboat, you don't create the wind, and you don't control the wind, but you can discern the wind and adjust to let the wind fill the sails and power the journey. The power of the wind can sail a ship around the world and against the prevailing currents. The Holy Spirit can transform your life from the inside out.

Develop a habit of spiritual receptivity, openness, responsiveness. No one listens to the leadings of the Spirit perfectly or always. So if you are going to walk with the Spirit, you have to know how to get back up and start over when you have slipped and fallen or just walked off again. You have to refuse condemnation, receive forgiveness, and then listen again. It may be something simple: "*Don't do that.*" "*Wait.*" "*Be still and know that I am God.*" "*Do not fear.*" The Holy Spirit in you guides you and convicts you and comforts you, and empowers you. But you have to listen and believe and obey.

Fifth,

E. Deal faithfully with the sins that grieve the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:29-30 *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Notice, the Holy Spirit is like a good friend who isn't just angry but deeply grieved by our sinful actions. Through confession and repentance, we restore the relationship.

Sixth,

F. Fill your life with things that complement the work of the Spirit.

The Spirit of God inspired God's Word and loves to work in us through God's word. So fill your mind and heart with the truths of God's word. The rich, full truths of God's word become like fuel, fat logs of good hardwood for the Holy Spirit to ignite and with which he warms up and lights up our lives.

Seventh

G. Put faith at the center of your life in the Spirit.

In **John 7:38-39**, Jesus uses all continuous forms of the verbs. That means you need to *keep coming* and *keep drinking* and *keep believing*. It is through believing that you begin a spiritual life with Jesus. And it is through believing that you live your spiritual life each day. God loves it when we believe in his promises and rely on him.

CONCLUSION

God himself came into the world to rescue and redeem lost people. Because of his great love for us He lived the life we should have lived and he lived it for us. He suffered and died as a sacrifice to pay for our sins. He rose again and ascended to heaven. The risen Christ gives not only His love and forgiveness but his Holy Spirit to anyone – anyone who thirsts and who turns to him and trusts in him. It is by God's grace, unearned and undeserved favor, that we are saved when we turn to Christ and trust in Him. Don't wait or hold back from the grace of God that he offers. Receive him and with him the life-changing, life-giving the gift of the Spirit. If you have received Christ.

You have a choice every day to play it safe, rely on your mind and emotions and control your life or to live the way you were made to live, connected to God and listening to him, relying on Him to show up and make a difference as you pray and listen and rely on and respond to him. That's what you were made for and redeemed for. Open your heart to a more deeply, spiritually, Christ-centered life.

Amen

Prayer of Confession

Almighty and merciful God, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. We have been far too indifferent to the wonderful gift and presence of your Holy Spirit, we have grieved him by our sins and quenched him with indifference and unbelief. Forgive our sins, renew our hearts, grant us a humble reliance on and responsiveness to your Holy Spirit. Restore us Lord, according to your promises declared to the world in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We ask in his name, Amen