

Thirsting for the Spirit of God

Let's turn together to the gospel of John, chapter 7, as we wrap up our series *Thirsting for God* with a message called *Thirsting for the Spirit of God*.

John 7:37-39

Reading this passage made me think of a guy I knew when I was a young Christian who, when he was at fast food restaurants like McDonald's would occasionally stand up on a table and start preaching to everyone in the restaurant. At the time I thought it was pretty cool that he could be such a bold witness for Christ, but now as I look back, I cringe a little thinking about the impression it must have left on those poor people trying to eat their Big Macs in peace. Preaching the gospel is good, but the way we do it needs to fit the context.

But at first glance, it seems like Jesus is doing the same thing. Jesus and his disciples are attending a feast in Jerusalem and it's the last and greatest day (which means the most heavily attended day) of the feast when all of a sudden Jesus stands up and cries out in a loud voice, *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!* It might seem like kind of a random thing to do when we first read it, but when we take a deeper look at the context, Jesus' loud proclamation takes on a profound depth of meaning and fits the context perfectly.

The feast that Jesus is attending was called the Feast of Booths. It was a weeklong party that celebrated the last harvest of the season so it was a really joyous feast. But the primary reason God instituted the Feast of Booths was to commemorate the Jew's journey in the wilderness after God delivered them from Egypt by the hand of Moses. It was called the Feast of Booths because every year the Jews would built huts (or booths) and move out of their homes and into in these booths for a week to remind themselves of how their ancestors were living in the wilderness without a land or a place to call home as God led them to the Promised Land.

Every morning of the feast, a priest would fill a golden pitcher with water from pool of Siloam and, with a large crowd following him, would take that pitcher to the temple and pour it into a funnel near the altar as a way of remembering how God provided water for the Jews in the desert.

That story is found in Exodus 17 when the Jews begin to grumble against Moses because they were thirsty and they demanded Moses give them water to drink. The Lord spoke to Moses and told him to strike a rock at Horeb and water would come out of the rock. Moses struck the rock, God did a miracle, and water came out of the rock and the people drank and were satisfied. But the story doesn't end there: later on the people are thirsty again and again they start complaining to Moses and say, "if only God had left us in Egypt or killed us back there in the wilderness, we'd be better off than we are now!" This gets Moses really mad, and when God tells Moses to just *speak* to the rock and water will flow from it, Moses either forgets or he is so frustrated he just wants to hit something, and he hits the rock again like he did the first time rather than speaking to the rock as God told him. Once again water flows from the rock, but because Moses disobeyed God by hitting the rock the second time, God tells Moses that he will not enter the Promised Land with his people.

It's all of this that the Jews are commemorating at the Feast of Booths, so when Jesus stands up, very possibly as the priest is carrying the pitcher of water to the temple, and calls anyone who is thirsty to come to him, he is claiming to be the rock that supplies living water to the thirsty. This explains why God was angry with Moses for striking the rock the second time. Jesus is the Rock who was struck once for

our sins so that the waters of salvation might flow to all who are thirsty, but having been struck for our sins on the cross, from now on we only need to speak to Jesus and ask to receive the living water. Jesus calls all who are thirsty to come him and drink of living water.

This living water is the Holy Spirit. John gives this commentary: *Now this [speaking of the living waters] 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. (vs. 39)*

My prayer this week has been that God will make us thirsty for the power and presence of the Spirit like we've never been before. Actually my prayer is that we be thankful and thirsty. That we be thankful for the Spirit's work that we are seeing and experiencing. I have only to look around this room to see examples of God's life and power at work.

Last week I shared about the need for the church to have a responsible and compassionate ministry to the poor, and Janice reminded me of the many examples of that compassion that reside in this congregation. We have many generous and caring people in this church and that is the work of the Spirit in you.

So we should be thankful for the Spirit's work going on in our midst and thirsty for more! When Jesus says, "as the Scripture has said" about the river of living water flowing he is almost certainly thinking of Ezekiel 47 where the prophet has a vision of a river coming forth from the temple. At first it's just a trickle, but then it is ankle deep and then its waist deep and then it was deep enough to swim in. We have rivers of living water flowing in this church and we should be so thankful and encouraged by that, but it can get deeper. We should long and thirst and pray that it get deeper. And let me share a couple reasons why we should not be content but thirsty.

I. The Spirit brings life to the church

When Jesus says "living water" will flow from the thirsty believer, it clues us in on the primary aspect of the Spirit's work: He brings life to the church. When scientists want to ascertain whether a planet could sustain life, they look for signs of water. If there's no water, they know there can be no life. The same is true of the church. If the living water of God's Spirit isn't flowing in a church then that church is spiritually dead.

It is the Spirit who brings the power of life to the church. Jesus told his disciples, after three years of training and discipling them, after three years of their seeing and even performing miracles, after three years of being with Jesus, that they needed to wait for the power of the Spirit. The church was born (life) on the day of Pentecost!

Sound doctrine, as important as it is, is dead doctrine unless the Spirit breathes life into it. Programs, as helpful as they can be in a church, will accomplish nothing of lasting value unless they are born of the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit. Worship is simply singing songs and sermons are simply speaking words if the Spirit isn't present in power to touch hearts and lives with something from heaven as we sing and hear God's word preached.

When the church is spiritually dead and barren, it doesn't need more programs. It doesn't need more planning or more strategies. It needs the Spirit to meet God's people in power. That power is supernatural, but after walking with the Lord for nearly 40 years I've noticed that power doesn't always look amazing or make us look impressive. I met a couple yesterday who are moving out here from

Seattle and they told me there are actually people in the city who dress up as super heroes and fight crime. The power of the Spirit doesn't usually make us look like super-heroes. We don't become "faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, or able to leap tall buildings in a single bound." The power the Spirit brings is the power of life. That means His power doesn't take us out of our lives, it fills us in our lives and as we live our lives. God's power works in the warp and woof of our everyday lives. Supernatural power that often manifests itself in ways that are not amazing or supernatural-looking.

I was really blessed this past week to do the games for the kids in VBS. I got to know the kids better and had a lot of fun with them. But I also had a reminder course in how much work it is to parent young children, and especially the work moms do. But there's no way to do it while wearing a cape or a big "S" on your chest. Moms and dads are superheroes who live their lives disguised as their mild-mannered alter-egos, and the power of the Spirit at work in them does do amazing things through them, but it isn't necessarily glamorous or supernatural looking.

And the same is true in the church. We can try to set up professional looking services and flawlessly executed ministries, but that image isn't real and God can't bless unreality. We need to jettison the idea that God's power is going to make us look amazing and flawless and embrace the truth that God's power is going to be demonstrated in our weakness and inadequacy, so that His power might be seen and He might be glorified. When human talent and ability does it, man gets the glory. When God does it in spite of human talent and ability, God gets the glory. The church doesn't need more of what man can do without God, we need more of what God can do through vessels dedicated to Him.

Oh, how we need the power of the Spirit in the church today! God has given us a supernatural job to do, and we can't do it apart from the power of the Spirit. He never intended us to do it apart from the Spirit. Transformed lives, dead sinners coming to life, hearts of stone becoming hearts of flesh, broken lives put back together, sick being healed – these aren't things that we can do in our own strength. If we think we can do these things by our own strength and ability we won't be thirsty for the Spirit, but when we realize that we can't do it apart from the Spirit we will be very thirsty! The Spirit brings life to the church.

II. The Spirit flows life *through* the church

The thirst-quenching power of the Spirit isn't content to satisfy the believer's thirst and stop there. Jesus doesn't say that whoever believes in Jesus will experience a well of living water flowing *into* their heart. No, "*out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*" God isn't looking for reservoirs of blessing, He is looking for rivers of blessing. Channels of His grace that will flow outward to others.

God delights to use ordinary believers to accomplish extraordinary things. I know that may sound like a cliché but let it stir faith up in your heart. If you're the wrong person for a ministry, but your heart is humble and you are available, then He just might want to use you to do a great work for His glory. If the church only allows professional ministers do ministry, ministry is going to get bottlenecked and little will get done. Ministry is multiplied when ordinary people are launched into ministry with faith and prayer and a big trust that God is a big God and doesn't need big people to do His work, He just needs available and obedient people to do His work.

Listen, God has given you grace to serve Him and He doesn't want you to hoard that grace. God isn't looking for consumers of grace, He's looking for conduits of grace. In the coming months and years I believe God wants to multiply ministry in this church. I got a call last week from a couple who felt the Lord speak to them in the message last week and they want to talk to me about starting a benevolence ministry. We've got about seven people who have expressed an interest in being a part of our missions

committee. Let ministry expand – not so that we can be noisy make a lot of noise and say we're busy. We don't need to start programs just to say we started them. Let ministry expand as we prayerfully seek God for how He wants to use us and then step out of the boat, trusting God that we don't sink.

And it doesn't have to be an official church "program" – in fact most of the ministry God wants to flow through His people probably won't be. It will be sharing Jesus with a neighbor, praying with a friend who's hurting, seeing God use you to lead a co-worker to Christ. The Spirit not only brings life to the church, He flows life *through* the church!

III. Let's pray for a greater move of the Spirit (ask band to come up)

The more we thirst for the Spirit, the more we will fervently pray for a move of the Spirit.

Samuel Chadwick wrote in the early 1900's: *The church that multiplies committees and neglects prayer may be fussy, noisy, enterprising, but it labors in vain and spends its strength for naught. It is possible to excel in mechanics and fail in dynamics. There is abundance of machinery; what is wanting is power.*

We don't need noise and fuss, we need power. We need the dynamic of the Spirit. Prayer says we're thirsty and when we come to God with faith-filled thirst, it wicks up God's power and presence.

When the woman with the bleeding condition pushed through the crowd to touch Jesus, she was thirsting for a touch from God. When the father whose daughter was critically ill begged Jesus to heal her, he was thirsting for a touch from heaven. Thirst for God moves us to prayer and God is moved by thirsty prayer.

This Thursday we'll be meeting here at 7pm to pray – let's come thirsty. Thirsty for a touch from heaven. Thirsty for a move of God. Thirsty and asking God to pour out His Spirit on us in a fresh way. We will be setting aside the 4th Thursday of every month as a time when we will gather here to pray.

Let's ring the bell

C. H. Spurgeon once said, "Prayer pulls the rope down below and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give only an occasional jerk at the rope. But he who communicates with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might."

Let's ring the bell boldly. Let's come thirsty. As we spend some time worshipping, I want to open the altars for anyone who just wants to come and ask God to pour out His Spirit. Touch from heaven. If you want to pray, the mic here will be open.

Let's take a few minutes. We're not in a hurry. Let's ring the bell.