

## If Anyone Thirsts

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. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:37-38

This great day was during the Feast of Tabernacles. During this festival, the Israelites were required to live in tents for seven days in remembrance of their 40 years wandering through the desert. Over the years, one particular ceremony had become tradition during this festival. Each day, at the time of the morning sacrifice, a priest led a procession to draw water out of the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher. After drawing the water, he returned to a temple filled with worshippers. During the priest's ascent to the altar with the pitcher, the worshippers sang the words from Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation." On the "last and greatest day" trumpets blasted as the priest spilled the water and drink offering onto the altar. This day served to commemorate God's miracle of water from the rock given to the thirsty Israelites at Meribah. (Exodus 17: 1-7)

It was at this point that Jesus stood and called, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to *me* and drink." During a ceremony reminding the people of how God satisfied their greatest physical need, Jesus offered *himself* as satisfaction for their greatest spiritual need. It must have momentarily stopped the service as every head turned in unison to find the source of this bold claim. John records there had been much controversy among the Jews at the festival regarding who Jesus was. Now, at the climax of the celebration, Jesus answered their questions by standing to say, in no uncertain terms, that *he* was the Christ whose sacrifice would fully atone for sin. Jesus ended all discussion with this announcement. For those at the sacred assembly, the only thing left to consider was whether what Jesus said was meant for them.

The question remains for consideration still today: "If anyone thirsts..." For some, the answer is "No." They are too busy running children to activities, caring for elderly parents or pursuing professional goals even to take notice of their condition. Others live a comfortable lifestyle, enjoying the pleasures that come with it, and don't see a need for what Jesus has to offer. Some might recognize the need, but feel they are quite capable of taking care of it on their own. There are also those gathered in the "sacred assembly" who come, but don't drink. They continue to thirst because they sip on fellowship, meetings and programs, but don't let *Jesus* fill them.

The unfortunate truth is that all of them *are* thirsty. Like the golden pitcher, they find themselves empty day after day. Repeatedly poured out into distractions, laziness and pride, they return to things that do not satisfy their thirst. Jesus' offer is meant for them because only he can satisfy. But they don't see it or want it. Sadly, their unquenched thirst will lead to death.

But for those who are aware of their thirst, the words of Jesus are an invitation. Too long they have wandered in the desert of guilt and shame. They are sorry for choices that left Jesus out of their life, and long for forgiveness. They know they've wasted his gifts and blessings on selfish living. They crave peace, knowing their attempts to earn God's favor in the past have failed. To them, this invitation to "come and drink" is a gift that gives pardon for sins, peace with God, and life eternal. They drink deeply, knowing that streams of living water will flow from within them. To the thirsty, Jesus' offer of himself is a gift received in humble thanks by those knowing they would be spiritually dead without it.

Jesus' disturbance at the Feast of Tabernacles was intentional. He wanted everyone to know exactly who he was. The way he addressed the crowd was also intentional. He wanted everyone to know why he came. We have this account written in the Word so that we intentionally consider our need. "If anyone thirsts..." Those who recognize their helpless condition receive his simple invitation to come to him and drink. In Jesus, God has provided for our greatest spiritual need.

**Prayer:**

Dear Heavenly Father, you've told me in your Word that only Jesus quenches thirst. Forgive me for pursuing all the things that fail to quench my thirst. I am thirsty. I thirst for the forgiveness and grace that is only possible through Jesus. Thank you for his sacrifice and the life that it has given me. Continue to nourish my soul by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Written by Dawn Schulz

Reviewed by Professor David Sellnow