

## The Great Claims of Jesus (John 7:37-39)

Today's passage from John takes us to the Feast of Tabernacles, the traditional time when the Jews erected temporary shelters of branches and palm leaves. The idea was to live inside these makeshift structures for one week and contemplate God's goodness, during their ancestors' nomadic wanderings. During those 40 years, the Israelites found themselves thirsty but without a source of water from which to drink. Every time, God always miraculously provided the water they desperately needed.

Jesus, however, proclaimed that "rivers of living water" would flow from the breasts of those who believed in him, and that they would never again experience thirst. This was something new. Water from the heart? Never thirst again? Jesus, who spoke in metaphors, was not referring to literal water but was alluding to the

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forthcoming Holy Spirit, who would take up residence in believers' hearts.

Throughout Scripture, water is symbolic of salvation and eternal life. As the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit is responsible for convicting hearts regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Simultaneously, the Spirit awakens hearts to the truth of the Gospel, which leads to “rebirth and renewal.” (Titus 3:5). The Spirit works to transform us into “new creations” through sanctification (2 Cor 5:17). Over our lifetimes, we are enabled to grow in and abundantly exhibit the “fruit” of the Spirit’s nature: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23), which, when experienced by unbelievers, causes them to be drawn to the Light.

So, this is a picture of the great claims of Jesus. It is a picture that should cause every person to search their own response to Jesus.

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The Feast of Tabernacles was the most popular feast among the Jews. For that reason, it was simply known as *The Festival* (1 Ki 8:2). It was also called *The Feast of Ingathering* (Ex 23:16) and *The Festival to the Lord* (Lev 23:39). The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated seven days.

Each Jewish family built a small stucco or tent-like structure in their yard or upon some other property they owned or secured for the occasion. Then they moved out of their home into the structure for the seven-day period. The Feast celebrated **two** significant events. **First**, it celebrated the day when Israel wandered about in the wilderness as strangers and pilgrims without a homeland. The purpose for moving into the stucco or tent-like structure was to keep before their minds, the wilderness wanderings of their forefathers (Lev 23:40-43). **Second**, the Feast was to be a period of thanksgiving for the completion of the harvest

season and for the goodness of God in all of life (Ex 23:16, Dt 16:13, 16). The people were to

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give thanks for all that God had given them: all the fruit of the land that enriched life and made life possible.

The ceremony of the Festival was most impressive and gives a dramatic picture of Christ's claims (Jn 7:37-39). On each of the seven days, the people came to the temple and brought some fruit as an offering and a few palm and willow branches. The branches were used to form a roof over the altar. Then the priest took a golden pitcher and led the people in a procession down to the pool of Siloam where he filled the pitcher with water. During this march the people played the flute and sang the Hallel, which was Psalms 113-118.

It was on the return march that the significant drama took place. As the pitcher of water passed through the Water Gate, the people repeated in unison: "With

joy you will draw water from the well of salvation” (Is 12:3). When the pitcher reached the altar, the water

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was poured over the altar as an offering to God. While this was being done, the people waved palm branches and recited the words “O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success” (Ps 118:25).

The idea of the processional was a dramatic way to thank God for rain, to offer prayer to God for more rain, and for a fruitful season in the coming year. It was a dramatic way for the people to acknowledge their need and dependence upon God for the rains, the water that gave them the fruit of the ground, and the bounty of life. The last day of the Feast was dramatic in particular, for the people repeated the processional seven times. Note a significant point: Scripture says the Feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated and fulfilled in the end time when our

Lord returns. The Feast will apparently symbolize our joy, liberty, and victory through the wilderness experience of life and the glorious provision of God: the glorious provision of living eternally and worshipping and seeing God throughout the universe (Zec 14:16).

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It was on “the last and greatest day of the Feast,” the day when the people marched in the processional seven times, that Jesus made his phenomenal claim. Some imagined Jesus shouting his claim just as the people finished saying, “Grant us success” (Ps 18:25).

Imagine the scene: Jesus did two unusual things. He stood (a teacher always sat in that day), and he cried out shouting loudly. Both actions would startle and shock the people to attention. Picture thousands of voices praying to God for the living rains in the coming season, reciting: “grant us success,” and then piercing the air comes the thunderous cry: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to

me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

Jesus made **three** phenomenal claims. **First**, he said that He, Jesus Christ, is the source of life: He is the one who can quench the real thirst of man’s being,

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who can meet the desperate need of man for prosperity, the real fruit and bounty of life.

Men do thirst. They thirst for physical water and they thirst for spiritual life. Jesus Christ claims to be the source, that is, the Water that can quench man’s thirst and give the fruit and bounty man so desperately needs in this life. He claims that he can do what water does. He can cleanse and purify. He can refresh. He can revitalize and energize.

**Second**, Jesus claimed to be the source of abundant life. Rivers of living water can flow out

from a person. An abundance of life can be experienced.

The death of Jesus Christ (His having been struck for the sins of the world) is the source of the living water. Out of his death, he was able to arise, and by arising he was able to conquer sin and death and to bring forth eternal life in all of its abundance.

**Third**, Jesus claimed that he is the source of the Holy Spirit. Rivers of living water refer to the Holy Spirit.

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This is a crucial verse, for it is the only place “living water” is defined. When Jesus spoke of giving “living water,” he meant he would give the Holy Spirit to a person. The presence of the Holy Spirit, of course, meant the experience of abundant and eternal life. Note: it is only the person who believes in Christ who receives the Holy Spirit. Belief in Him is essential. Christ is the Giver of the Spirit.

So, what are the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading in John?

In a powerful moment, Jesus invites those who are thirsty to come to him and drink, promising that “rivers will flow from within them.’ This symbolizes the Holy Spirit who refreshes and empowers us. We are encouraged to continually seek the Spirit’s presence in our lives for strength and renewal.

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Please bow your heads as I pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, on this day we come to you with thirsty hearts, seeking the living water that only you can provide. As we celebrate and remember your sacrifice, we ask that you fill us with your Holy Spirit and quench our thirst for righteousness. Help us to come to you with open hearts and minds, ready to receive your love and grace. May we never forget

the words you spoke on the last and greatest day of the Feast, inviting all who are thirsty to come to you and drink. We thank you for your unfailing love and ask that you continue to guide us on our journey of faith. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**