



Text: John 7:1ff (focus: v.37-39)¹

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 18 – “No One Ever Spoke Like This Man!”²

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Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Chapter seven of John’s Gospel presents us with a series of events that occurred around Jesus during one particular feast in Jerusalem. If you were to sit down and read the chapter at one go there is a small portion that rises like an island out from the sea. Here it is...

³⁷ 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 the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” ³⁹ Now 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. John 7:37-39

This is where we’re headed this morning but to understand the significance of what Jesus has said, we need to approach the island from the sea. I want to give you a sense of the surroundings for this teaching because it’s only then that we can really appreciate what Jesus is saying. Let’s begin the approach.

Last week we spent time with Jesus as he taught the people that he was the Bread of Life and we discovered that, as a result, many of his disciples withdrew and did not walk with him anymore. The crowd was not interested in a Savior who was going to give his life for them to be their spiritual “bread.” The drama of that rejection continues in the seventh chapter.

“After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.” John 7:1

Remember, when John wants to refer to Jesus’ opponents, he often refers to them as “the Jews.” In other words, the religious leaders of Judaism wanted to kill Jesus and so John tells us that Jesus stayed away from Jerusalem and Judea because that was the religious centre of Judaism.

Of course, many Jewish people also believed in him and followed him and in the very next verse, John uses the term “the Jews” in a broader, non-confrontational sense. He tells us...

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.

²This sermon is taken in large part from R. Kent Hughes, *John : That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999), 211.



“Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths was at hand.” John 7:2

This feast is a huge part of the setting for Jesus’ teaching. John assumes that his readers will know something about this feast but we don’t. For the people of Jesus’ day it had a significance that was like Christmas and Thanksgiving have for us. The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles was a harvest feast. It took place when all of the harvest had been gathered. It was a joyous time of celebration, a very well-attended festival, for two reasons. It was an exciting festival to attend, and it was one of the three festivals that required the attendance of every Jewish male who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem. You can find the Biblical basis for this feast in Leviticus chapter 23.

During the feast great crowds came to town. It was a colorful event. Temporary shelters sprang up in the most unlikely places—on flat rooftops, down dark alleys, even in the courts of the temple—and all of the shelters followed the building code established by the rabbis. The walls were extra-thin so that light came through, and the roof had to show enough sky so the stars could be seen. That was to remind the Jews of how they had wandered in the wilderness and of how God had provided for them during the time that Moses had led them out of Egypt and into the Land of Promise.

The feast was a wonderful and festive time. People dressed in their Sabbath best for the week. They called it “the season of our gladness.” It was so festive that to the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah, it was a symbol of the glorious future of the people of God. In the fourteenth chapter of his prophecy, he wrote of that golden age to come and of a future, universal Feast of Tabernacles.

At the heart of the celebration was a daily ritual, a ritual we must understand in order to catch the sense of John 7. The writings of the rabbis of Jesus’ day tell us that each morning great multitudes would gather at the Temple. They would come with a citrus fruit in their left hands – called an *etrog*. The word *etrog* does not appear in the Bible but it is an Aramaic word that means “that which shines” – like the skin of a lemon or orange has a hard finish that shines. The *etrog* was a fruit called “the citron” which is a golden fruit a little bigger than a lemon. The *etrog* was a reminder of the fruitfulness of the Promised Land to which God had brought them and of their bountiful blessings. In their right hands the people would carry a *lulav*. The word means “a sprout” and it refers to the branches of a plant. The *lulav* was a combination of the branches of three trees—a palm tree, a willow, and a myrtle. Those three trees were taken as emblems to represent the stages of their ancestors’ journey through the wilderness under Moses’ leadership.

Each morning the people gathered together, and after the priest was sure everything was in order, he would hold out a golden pitcher. The crowds would then follow the priest from the temple to the Pool of Siloam, chanting some of the



great Psalms and waving their *lulavs* in rhythm with musicians playing all the way. As they approached the Pool of Siloam, the priest would dip his pitcher into the water, and the people would recite some beautiful words from Isaiah...

“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” Isaiah 12:3

Then the crowd would march back to the temple, entering through the Water Gate to the blast of the priests’ trumpets. The priest would then circle the altar once, ascend with accompanying priests to the platform, and pour the water out.

On the one hand, this water was intended as a symbolic prayer for rain to bless the crops and as it was poured out the people would chant...

“Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!” Psalm 118:25

But more than a prayer for rain, it was a prayer for the pouring out of the Spirit on the day when Messiah came. The rabbis of Jesus’ day tell us that the prayer that was upon the lips of the worshippers was: **“May God send His Spirit upon us now.”**³ The LORD had spoken through the prophet Joel and had declared that in the day in which Messiah came...

“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” Joel 2:28

For seven days every year during this feast the people prayed for rain upon their crops and for the pouring out of God’s Spirit in the coming of the Messiah. That is the context we need to have in our minds in order to understand what Jesus’ purpose in what he did.

All of this was going on up at Jerusalem while Jesus remained in Galilee, where a conversation ensued between the Savior and his physical brothers, his own flesh and blood.

“So his brothers said to him, ‘Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.’” John 7:3-4

Jesus’ brothers were egging him on: “Come on, Jesus, if you think you’re so important, show the world what you can do!” The reason for their tone is given in verse 5...

“For not even his brothers believed in him.” John 7:5

³ Mitch & Zhava Glaser, *The Fall Feasts of Israel*, Moody Press, 1987, p. 176



His own earthly brothers failed to embrace him as their Savior! How tragic! First, the religious leadership wanted to kill Him, and now his own flesh and blood were urging him to go to the celebration at the risk of his life.

Jesus' reply is a key to understanding the passage under consideration because it reveals his thoughts. He said to his brothers...

“My time has not yet come, but your time is always here.” John 7:6

I want to draw your attention to the word Jesus used for “time”—*kairos*—a word that here, as often, carries the idea of opportunity. Jesus meant that the opportune time had not yet come, though that time came shortly afterwards and Jesus did go to the feast (see v. 10).

Jesus' timetable is determined by his Father in heaven, not by popular demand or expectation. Jesus did not lie to his brothers. He was simply saying that the right moment had not arrived, and he was waiting for that moment. Jesus was up to something very big. In fact, possibly, **outside of the cross, it was the most visually dramatic event of his life.** Jesus waited in Galilee while the scene was being set for him in Jerusalem. The drama was building.

“But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.” John 7:10

When he did not have his disciples or family with him, he could travel incognito. So in the middle of the feast, he chose to go to Jerusalem and he arrived in a city that was buzzing with tension. The Jewish leaders had been watching for him but hadn't seen him...

**“The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, ‘Where is he?’”
John 7:11**

The verb tenses in that verse are continuous. The Jewish leaders (his enemies) were continually asking, “Where is he?” not because they wanted to hear his teachings but because they wanted to put him to death. They were hunting Jesus. Even the multitudes felt the tension.

**“And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, ‘He is a good man,’ others said, ‘No, he is leading the people astray.’
Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.” John 7:12-13**

Behind locked doors controversies raged about who Jesus was and what his powers were, and outside the discussions were carried on in hushed tones. No one wanted to speak too openly for fear of reprisal by the religious leadership. The tension was palpable.



At this point Jesus came to the temple and began to teach, and people recognized that there was something different about his teaching. The guards in the temple, men who had heard all the great teachers of the day, said of Jesus...

“No one ever spoke like this man!” John 7:46

When the crowd questioned Jesus about why his teaching was so powerful, he said...

“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.” John 7:16

The crowd was large and it was mixed. Among his hearers were some of the religious leaders who were plotting against him. He asked them why they were trying to kill him (v.19). The religious leaders denied their plot and tried to turn his question into an accusation of mental instability or spiritual perversion...

“You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?” John 7:20

But many in the crowd knew full well that the religious leaders had their knives out for Jesus. They wanted him dead because he was claiming to be sent from God; he was claiming that he was the Christ, sent by God to save his people from their sins. But they were also confused by Jesus' declaration that he was sent from God. They thought they knew where Jesus was from – he was from Galilee, his family lived in Nazareth and so the crowd was “muttering” and chattering among themselves...

“Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.” John 7:26-27

At this point, Jesus turns up the heat himself...

“So Jesus proclaimed [OR, cried out], as he taught in the temple, ‘You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me.’” John 7:28-29

Jesus “cried out” to these people: “You think you know me, but you don’t!”

Let me stop here for a moment. We often think we’ve got Jesus figured out. We often think we know him. Many of us have created a Jesus in our imaginations that does not exist according to the Bible. And those of us who have been involved in religious life need to be particularly aware of this. We develop a “religious Jesus” in our minds who is divorced from Biblical reality. We need to come back again and again to God’s Word and allow God’s Word to refresh and reform our understanding of Him. Our minds and hearts need to be in a



constant process of growth and reformation in our understanding of Jesus Christ and whenever we come to the place where we think we have him all figured out, let me tell you, we haven't!

Let's move on because the drama of this feast was escalating. The high point of the Feast of Booths was the final day of the feast, "the great day," as John calls it and everything was coming together for Jesus to cry out again.

Let me tell you a bit more about the Feast of Booths. On the seventh day, the priest would again come to the temple, followed by the great throng chanting their Psalms and waving their *lulavs* and carrying their *etrogs*. They would come in through the Water Gate. The trumpets would sound again. But this time the priest would circle the altar seven times in succession—just like at the walls of Jericho. And when he came around for the sixth time, he would be joined by another priest carrying a pitcher of wine. They would ascend the ramp to the altar. There would be a pause as the priest raised his pitcher. The crowd would begin to shout to the priest to hold it higher, and he would try to do so. It was considered to be the height of joy in an Israelite's life if he could see the water being poured onto the altar.

It was in that hush and at that dramatic moment as the people prayed for the pouring of the Spirit that Jesus acted.

"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

What a bold move! What an act of courage! What a moment! He chose just the right psychological moment. His words were precise and powerful. What a beautiful, powerful, dramatic presentation of profound spiritual truth. As the pitcher was lifted up, Jesus cried out! I can't help but think that in a few months from this moment, Jesus would be lifted up on a cross and he would cry out again and give his life for us all (Matt 27:50).

"If anyone thirsts..." John 7:37

Have you ever been thirsty? I mean, really thirsty?

When I was in university I worked in a leather tannery one summer. My first day on the job it was 30 degrees Celsius and humid and they put me to work in the drying end of the plant. The hides would be processed in various vats to tan them and colour them and then they had to be dried before they sold. There were a variety of different driers and I worked beside one where the hides were draped over poles and hung in an open drying room that ran at about 100 degrees Fahrenheit. By the end of that first day I had lost over eight pounds of



water! I was thirsty! Ruth and I went to a restaurant for dinner that night and I drank two jugs of pop, just to try and rehydrate.

Jesus uses a powerful image here, especially to those in the Middle East. They understood what he was saying. They knew what it was to be thirsty—they understood. Jesus was talking about our thirst for God. Jesus was using language that leaned heavily on the prophet Isaiah. God had offered the same invitation through Isaiah who wrote...

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live...” Isaiah 55:1-3

Jesus was offering water for our souls. We have a deep thirst for what is lasting and eternal and the truth is: **only God is forever!** One of the tragedies of our age is that we twist the thirst for God into a desire for a new wardrobe, a new car, a new experience, or whatever. We “spend our money” on things that do not satisfy, when what we really need is God.

And what is even more sad is that often, even if we realize that we are spiritually thirsty, we take wrong measures to satisfy it. Instead for coming to God to satisfy our thirst, we opt for religion. We drink deep of religious activities – we do this and we do that “in Jesus’ name” – but we don’t come to Jesus for water and we end up bitter and thirsty because religion is bitter water. God declared through the prophet Jeremiah...

“my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Jeremiah 2:13

Jesus encourages a healthy thirst. Are you thirsty? In the next line Jesus tells us how to be refreshed. He said...

“...let him come to me and drink.” John 7:37

His invitation is open to anyone who thirsts. To hunger and thirst for the water that Christ gives is to hunger and thirst for Him.

How are we to drink this water? Although the offer is free and open to all, yet there are some terms to be met. C. S. Lewis in his children’s novel *The Silver Chair* puts his finger on this in the clearest of terms. In the story a girl by the name of Jill, seeing a lion, is scared out of her wits and runs into the forest. She doesn’t realize that the lion is Aslan, the figure in Lewis’ stories that represents



Jesus Christ. You see, in the Bible, Jesus is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” (Rev 5:5) Jill runs so hard away from the Lion that she wears herself out and is just about to die of thirst, or so she thinks, when she hears the gurgling of a brook in the distance. She approaches it and is almost ready to go to the brook when on the grass before her is the same lion.

“Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion.

“I’m dying of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the Lion.

“May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer.

“I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion—no one who had seen his stern face could do that—and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted.

Do you see what Lewis is saying in this picture? When you come to the water you have to yield yourself to Jesus by faith in order to get the water. You must trust him. You must believe in him. You must surrender yourself into his hands.

How thirsty are you for God? Are you dying of thirst? Let me tell, you: whether you feel it or not, you are! Without the living water he offers you will die.

Some of us need to realize that we are thirsty, that we need that water so badly that we are going to die without it. We need to step out on faith, yielding to the



Lion of the tribe of Judah, and receive the water of eternal life from him. And if we do, he tells us...

“Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” John 7:38

Jesus is saying that the part of us that is never satisfied, the part of us that craves so much, becomes, when we receive this water, the part that is satisfied. When we believe in Jesus the Spirit of God comes into our lives and provides us with “rivers of living water.”

Notice that Jesus does not say “river” but “rivers.”⁴ Rivers of living water flow out of us by virtue of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. When a person comes to Christ and satisfies his thirst as Christ would have him do, satisfaction flows out of him to others who in turn, come to Christ for living water for their own souls.

Michael Oh was a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania in the spring of 1990. He tells the story of how God poured a river of living water through his life and into the life of another, thirsty man during Spring Break on Daytona Beach, Florida. For those of you who don't know, the university Spring Break in Florida is a drunken party to which thousands of students flock each year. It's a sad case in point of people who are really thirsty for God “spending their money” on things that don't satisfy.

Michael wrote...

If it had been one year earlier I would have been at Daytona Beach to join in the partying. As it was, God had intervened mercifully in my life before going to college, and I was there for a beach evangelism project ... We combed the beaches looking for people to engage in conversation, hoping to get a chance to share a clear Gospel message. We went in pairs. I usually tried to grab an upperclassman that I could hide behind emotionally if not physically.

One day I was paired with a friend Janet (an upperclassman). It was about time to call it a day, and I was ready to slink back into being inconspicuous again after a long day of being stared at and laughed at by the hundreds. I don't remember who it was who suggested that we try just one more time, but I'm guessing that it was Janet.

So we walked the beach and Janet (who is Korean-American like me) says to me, "It would be nice to talk with some Asians." Nodding, I added bravely, "And it would be nice to talk with people who are away from the crowd and by themselves." "If it were two people that would be nice," Janet remarked. "And two guys," I said.

⁴ No single Old Testament scripture is in view but many form the backdrop for Jesus' declaration. For example: Zech 14:8, Joel 3:18, Isa 44:3; 58:11, Ps 78:15-16.



A few moments later we both looked up on the horizon and there by the edge of the water were two Asian guys sitting by themselves. Janet and I looked at each other and took the opportunity that God had given.

We shared the Gospel with two exchange students, Caleb and Henky, from Indonesia studying in Canada. Both were very friendly but also uninterested in the Christian faith, almost hostile to it. One had recently lost thousands of dollars at an Atlantic City casino and was at a loss for what to do.

Despite the spiritual gap, we hit it off relationally and eventually Janet and I followed up with them visiting them in Toronto that summer.

During that visit God opened up Caleb's heart to the Gospel. Life had become tough for him, and he even showed me the roof of his apartment where he almost took his own life. From hopelessness to hope, God rescued Caleb that day.

20 years later I received an email from a man named Caleb from Indonesia with the subject line, "Greetings from an old friend."

He wrote,

"I wonder if you still remember me. You shared about Christ to me on the beach of Daytona, FL. Few months after that, you drove to Toronto, Ontario with your friend Janet, with a message from God that He loves me and wants to use me. That's the turning point of my walk with God, the moment that I consider myself born again.

God has done many wonderful things in my life and through my life since then. Praise be to His glory! ..."

Today Caleb serves as executive pastor of a church of 10,000 people in Surabaya City, Indonesia... He told me that he'll never forget how there up on the roof where he had almost committed suicide I said to him, "God is going to use you in this world."⁵

Caleb was thirsty for God, but he didn't know it until Michael shared Christ's invitation with him. He was a thirsty man until Michael told him that God loved him and wanted to come into his life and fill him with living water. Two weeks ago I said that evangelism is nothing more than one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Well, it's also nothing more than one thirsty person telling another where to find water.

⁵ Desiring God blog, Feb 11, 2011, "Despite Us, God Works," Michael Oh



Jesus said...

**“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**

Are you thirsty? Jesus says, “Come to me. Believe in me. Drink from me.” Will you come to him?

- **Invitation to Prayer**
- **Final Song: To the River**
- **Benediction**